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ALMACK'S

A NOVEL.

" Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ALMACK'S.

CHAPTER I.

A CHANGE OF SCENE.

“What mighty contests rise from trivial things!”

POPE.

LADY Anne returned home from her ride in high spirits, and at dinner she was again fortunate in having Colonel Montague next her. Their conversation turned upon the neighbourhood. Lionel was inquiring about the different families, of whom he recollected little more than their names, and Lady Anne was too happy to tell him all and every thing about them.

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“ Lord Glenmore is an old man, is not he ? ”

“ Oh dear, yes ! ” said Lady Anne ; “ turned sixty at least. You will, of course, see him to-morrow, for he is a most intrepid fox-hunter, and probably his pretty bride may accompany him. That was certainly an extraordinary marriage, one of those improbable things, which, if one read of in a novel, one would be sure to call ridiculously absurd.” And then followed an account of it.

“ How old is Lady Glenmore ? ” said Lionel, in one of the pauses.

“ She was sixteen when she married, and Lord Glenmore was sixty. There’s a curious disproportion for you ! ”

“ And are they happy ? ”

“ Oh ! by all accounts, supremely so ; and now that there are hopes of an heir, the little beauty can turn the hoary statesman round her finger.” Then came inuendoes of the different sets that had been made at the old Marquis by the ladies of the neighbourhood, either for

misfortune to differ once or twice with his grace on political questions, yet, upon the whole, he knew few men, the general tenor of whose opinions so exactly agreed with his own. There was the present Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, his lamented friend, the late Lord Hazlemere, General Boyce, and one or two others who had begun life at the same time as Lord Norbury, but none whose conduct so entirely met with his lordship's approbation, as the present subject of panegyric, the Duke of Derwent. His grace might not, perhaps, be called a wise man, was certainly not an agreeable man, had no *savoir vivre*;—it was all sterling worth.—Then the duchess's merits were brought forward; but of her much less was said: amiable, a domestic character, much unobtrusive goodness, most extensive charities, a great botanist, wonderful taste for cultivating flowers. “And surprising love of poultry!” added Lady Anne, with an arch look. The earl gave a kind of smile; then, as if to remove

any impression the smile might have made, he concluded very solemnly, by declaring her grace of Derwent to be a most excellent character, a woman for whom he entertained a great respect.—The company heard and believed in silence.

The young Earl of Tresilian, the duke's only son, was pronounced to be a promising young man; had moved the address last month in the House, in a superior style. Dr. Sloper remembered that he distinguished himself at Cambridge; and Lord George, that he was a *spoon* at Eton. Lady Norbury thought his marriage had been a sad thing, a perfect mis-alliance, the daughter of some doctor at Cambridge. Here Dr. Sloper interrupted, and said that he was a celebrated scholar, the daughter a very accomplished beauty. Lord Norbury feared that Lady Tresilian would prove a perfect blue, a sort of *bel esprit*, a kind of character much to be deprecated in a woman of fashion. What could they

have to do with learning, or that sort of thing? Lord Mordaunt said she was devilish handsome, and sang like an angel. Lord Dorville was positive she had thick ankles, which was a decided blemish. Lady Anne wondered how Lady Mary Derwent, the duke's daughter, agreed with her over-accomplished sister-in-law. Lady Mary was so very quiet, timid, and modest, so shy and unpretending, that it was difficult to guess how such opposite characters could go on well together; but she understood they did. Some people thought Lady Mary plain, but she did not: rather too pale, perhaps; and then not good-featured, and pitted with the small-pox, very much freckled also, with a bad-shaped chin, and short-sighted to a misfortune; yet still, strange to say, she was very pleasing and interesting.

Lord Norbury concluded the conversation, by expressing how peculiarly fortunate a circumstance he considered it, that so humble an individual as himself, should have had the happiness

of bringing about a reconciliation between two families of such importance, whose unfortunate disagreements no one had more sincerely lamented than his lordship. He was to have the honour to receive all his noble friends the next week, and he should always hereafter look back with satisfaction upon the day which would witness their first meeting at Norbury.

“And you will allow, dear Papa,” said Lady Anne, laughing, “that those French ducks have proved birds of good omen?”

Lord Norbury did not vouchsafe any answer, and the subject soon after dropped. Not many of the company present knew to what her ladyship alluded, though all were aware that the two noble families of Derwent and Glenmore had had no intercourse till lately, for above twenty years. It so happened, that the young and childish Lady Glenmore had a passion for poultry and birds of all sorts; and understanding that there was a splendid menagerie at Derwent vale, she became wild to see it, and at

last she persuaded the marquis to let her write a note to the duke, whom she had happened to see once at an inn, to ask leave to view all the curiosities at his chateau. Such a request from a beautiful bride was of course immediately granted, and an invitation was sent in due form to Lord and Lady Glenmore, to spend the day at Derwent Vale; and the duke and duchess did the honours in the most hospitable manner. The little marchioness was charmed with her reception; and at parting she shook the duke most cordially by the hand, and hoped they should be always good friends and neighbours; and this frankness quite delighted their graces of Derwent. The grandees of the county had all met at a great ball at the town of H—— soon after Christmas; and Lady Glenmore, hearing that Lady Norbury had got some most extraordinary poultry lately from South America, invited herself to Norbury to see these curious strangers: adding, “Pray ask the Duchess of Derwent to meet us, that I may

hear her opinion: she knows more about poultry than any body I ever met with."

This was said in perfect thoughtlessness: Lady Norbury, who did not imagine they were even on speaking terms, was much surprised, but Lord Norbury chose to take the thing up in a political light. It was necessary for him to be great and pompous. He wished to consolidate the new coalition, and strengthen this friendship by every means, public and private. His French ducks and Brazilian chickens were, indeed, to do great things, perhaps to save the county of H—— from another ruinous contest; and the engagement was immediately made. The Derwent family promised to meet Lord and Lady Glenmore at Norbury any time during the winter; they had no engagements which would interfere; but, soon after, Lady Glenmore was unfortunately so very far from well, she durst not leave home; then came an account of what was hoped to be the cause of her indisposition; and nothing could exceed the joy and

the anxiety of all the world, that the noble marquis might not be disappointed. A few weeks afterwards brought the pleasing intelligence, that Lady Glenmore, considering her situation, was wonderfully well, quite equal to a visit to Norbury,—ten miles would be nothing now that the roads had been Macadamized. She longed to see all the curious birds, and she hoped the dear duchess would meet her. Such were the extraordinary arrangements which had been made a few weeks preceding the election at Merton: such the origin of this famous political reconciliation, which Lord Norbury expected would be handed down to posterity as a thing of moment. His lordship's vanity never had been more agreeably flattered; he had really nothing left to wish for. Not so Lady Norbury; she wished to have her house clear of the common run of company before the *distingués* arrived; but how to manage to get rid of so many who found Norbury a very convenient resting-place, was not easy. It required dexterous

management, and we shall soon see how far her ladyship understood that kind of manœuvring, which is so frequently put in practice in houses of great resort.

It so happened that, on the evening of this day, something went wrong with most of the party at Norbury. After the agreeable *tête-à-tête* conversation Lady Anne had had during dinner, and the general harmony which then prevailed, she little expected so sudden a change of scene.

Her ladyship had retired to her own apartment, to write to her cousin Lady Hauton, immediately after the ladies had left the dining-room; and it was during her short absence, that all the strange events occurred which I must now relate. In order to give full force to the *why* and the *wherefore*, the *pour* and the *contre*, to explain *why* the earl and his countess were so visibly out of sorts when they came down to tea, we must in the first place give the conversation which passed be-

tween Lord and Lady Norbury in her ladyship's dressing-room.

Lady Norbury had, as usual, retired to her boudoir, her favourite *sanctum sanctorum*, where none but especial favourites ever intruded, to seek a little repose after her dinner fatigues, when Lord Norbury entered, without even knocking, "Well, my dear Emily," said his lordship, in perfect good-humour at the idea of a large party, for the earl was one of those whom company always made happy, "I find that Lord and Lady Tresilian come the day after to-morrow. - How shall we hold them all?"

"Oh dear! don't clap the door so, my lord! it does jar my poor nerves. I have been talking to the housekeeper just now, and it is not possible to hold so many people, unless some of the present party take themselves off."

"Well! there is no difficulty in that; I shall give the Abbé a hint: he may go and pay his visit at Etheringham Castle, the Beaulieus

are at home ; and Dr. Sloper one can always send away, Sir Edward Barrington might take him back with him to the Grove."

"Oh ! but theirs are only bachelors' rooms, that would do little good. To be sure, I could move Lord George and Colonel Montague ; but that will not be necessary, because the other rooms will do for the ladies' maids. I do believe this is the worst house for bed-rooms in the whole county ; for its size, as bad as ever was built anywhere."

"I see no use in superfluity of bed-rooms ; it only serves as an excuse for overgrown squeezing parties ; and most vulgar annoyances in my humble opinion they are. Your ladyship is aware that the Sydenhams come to-morrow."

"Oh yes, but they will be gone before any of the others arrive ; and, very luckily, they take Mrs. Metcalf back with them."

"You don't mean to say that the Sydenhams only stay one night ?"

“ This is the first time they have even done that ; they generally only dine here.”

“ But I wished particularly to have them to meet Lord and Lady Glenmore ; indeed, my dear, it was very stupid of you to manage so ill. What have Mrs. and Miss Sydenham done to be so out of favour with you ?”

“ I thought, my lord, you wished to have a select party, and with my own will I never would be bored with the natives ; I hope to goodness we have had enough of them this year. That talkative, prosing Mrs. Metcalf will be a good riddance ; but then she leaves that odious Miss Bevil behind her !”

“ Mrs. Metcalf is very amusing, and full of anecdote ; and Miss Bevil passes in a large party as an eccentric, a travelled *bel esprit* old maid ; I do not think I wish either of them to go at all.”

“ Then you must build more bed-rooms, my dear lord ; and better call Norbury a receptacle for demirep widows, and old maids with cracked reputations,—a refuge for the destitute. I dare

say you may always have a full house of those at any time."

"Well, and I should much prefer them to your ladyship's *protégées*, the entertaining Miss Molyneux's; I do think if you could get rid of them, they would be *d'une aimable* absence."

"Mr. Molyneux confided his daughters to my care, during the time he is obliged to be at Brighton for Mahomet's baths," said Lady Norbury in her most *posée* manner; "and I shall certainly not turn them out of the house: that you may depend upon, my lord."

"And these two d—d stupid girls are to prevent our keeping the two handsome Sydenhams; such a mother and daughter as one seldom sees for beauty?"

"Now what can you mean, Lord Norbury? the Miss Molyneux's have only a bed-room and dressing-room between them. That would never do for Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Sydenham."

"But my favourite, Laura, might be in Dr. Sloper's room."

“What! the superfine Miss Sydenham in a single man's room, in the bachelors' row! Why, my lord! what are you thinking of? I can tell you, if all you have asked come, we shall be more than full. You know the blue bed was taken down some time ago, and the state apartment is quite dismantled: all the things were sent to Gillows's to be cleaned, a long time since.”

“Dear! how provoking! How stupid of the housekeeper to take the bed down before we went to London!”

“The steward told her to do so; he said it was your particular wish. Storer told me that Crabstock said it was to be done directly, in case the state-bed should be wanted next year, should the King go this road.”

“How ridiculous of Crabstock to suppose I should want to have the bed prepared before I went to town! But those people never can understand more than half one tells them.”

“I never expect they should,” said Lady

Norbury ; “ so, where there is no mistake made, I am agreeably disappointed. But, my Lord, as Miss Bevil is your particular friend and came on your invitation, cannot you give her a hint to go ? I understand Mrs. Sydenham makes a point of not having her, because there is always such difficulty in getting rid of her.”

“ I flatter myself,” said the earl, stroking his chin, as he always did when he thought favourably of himself—“ I say, lady Norbury, I flatter myself, that notwithstanding my deference to the fair sex, which, I believe, I may call habitual, yet that still no lady could venture to stay at Norbury, unless I chose to make her welcome. If your ladyship can manage politely to dismiss those two pale friends of yours, I will give *la Bevil* her *cong  * very shortly. Do you understand me now ? I make one to depend on the other. Godfrey Mildmay returns home soon ; the sister is a pretty smart girl whom every body likes ; and Colonel Montague is my particular *prot  g  * at this moment ; I wish

to *lancer* him into public life. Are you asleep, Lady Norbury? or do you hear with your eyes shut?"

"Thank God, I am not deaf yet, or blind either!" said Lady Norbury, "as I believe some people wish me to be, and others think I am. I shall obey your Lordship's command if I can; but rather than be rude to the Miss Molyneux's, I would endure Miss Bevil yet a little longer."

"*Comme il vous plaira,*" said the earl; and in this amiably obliging frame of mind they went down stairs together in apparent harmony. But Lady Norbury's countenance still showed traces of pettishness; which Lady Anne, accustomed to read and translate every line in her mother's face, could not mistake. She guessed that her displeasure had to do with the Sydenhams. The ladies of that family Lady Norbury never could endure, because both Lord Norbury and Lord Mordaunt were their admirers; Mrs. Sydenham loved to flirt with both, or

either. As there never had been any thing said against that lady's reputation, at least that the countess was aware of, she sometimes thought the object was to gain Miss Sydenham for her son ; and this was a state offence in her ladyship's eyes. A flirtation with the mother was a mighty foolish thing, quite ridiculous, but could lead to nothing. In either case the less they were at Norbury the better. One thing was lucky, Anne could not bear them any more than herself.

“ Dear ! how late they are in coming down to tea ! ” said Lady Norbury ; “ and Miss Maria Molyneux has so much trouble sitting by that hot urn ; and Colonel Montague and Lord George and Miss Louisa, where are they all ? ”

“ Oh, they are in the music-room, ” said Miss Molyneux ; “ I heard the guitar just now, and both the gentlemen were singing ; but they did not seem to want any body else, and so I came away. ”

“ Miss Louisa seems to think two strings to

her bow a good plan," said Lord Mordaunt ;
"commend me to your *militaires* for charming
the women."

"Do, Dora, tell them tea is quite cold," said
Miss Maria Molyneux in a peevish tone. And,
as the dawdling Dora rose deliberately to obey,
Colonel Montague, Lady Anne, and Godfrey
Mildmay, entered from the library.

"Pray, Miss Molyneux," said Lord Norbury,
looking up from the Peerage, where he had been
studying the Derwent descent, "what made
you say Colonel Montague was in the music-
room with Miss Mildmay? You see, he was
in the library with my daughter Anne ; she
seems to have had two beaux with her."

"I am sure I thought so, my lord ; somebody
said so, I am certain ; you told me, Maria, did
not you ?"

"I ! Dora ? I never told you such a thing,
for I knew all the time that Miss Louisa was
alone, *tête-à-tête*, with Lord George : she has
been singing to him this last hour."

"I suspect *with* him, you mean," said the Earl; "young ladies attend so little to grammatical niceties."

"Well!" answered the affronted Maria, "then she has been singing *to* him and *with* him, and talking *to* him and *with* him. Will that do, my lord?"

"Oh, perfectly!" said Lord Norbury, "any thing but *at* him."

"Oh, I can use *at*, too, if your lordship is so fond of those little particles," returned the young lady, pertly; "he looking *at* her, she setting *at* him."—Louisa and Lord George entered at this moment singing the *refrain* of that French air, "*Ca m'est egal, ça m'est egal!*"

"That your tea is cold, I suppose you mean?" said Miss Molyneux, "which it must be, decidedly, by this time."

"You two seem to have been very comfortable in the music-room," said Lord Norbury, fixing his cold, scrutinizing eye on Louisa. She looked down and tried to laugh, but it would

not do ; her face was suffused with the brightest scarlet, for her complexion was so transparently fair, that the slightest emotion always brought the most beautiful colour into her cheeks.

“ Indeed, we have been very happy !” said the saucy Lord George, enjoying the young lady’s confusion ; “ at least I can answer for myself, I have heard some sweet music. What made all of you go away ?” said he, turning to the rest.

“ Did you want us then ?” said Lionel archly. Lady Anne was quite surprised ; she yet could hardly make it out. Lord Norbury turned his chair full round to where Louisa Mildmay sat, playing with her tea-spoon to hide her confusion, which was not a little increased by his lordship’s earnest observation of her, ending by his slow and pompous delivery of these words :—

“ Miss Mildmay, allow me to congratulate you upon the happy effect which music seems to have upon your complexion : it has, indeed, produced

the finest bloom : I know of no rouge to be compared to it ; the true carmine :” his lordship added something about lilies and roses, which was not quite intelligible.

Poor Louisa ! it was very distressing to be thus made a mark of publicly. Godfrey looked at her reproachfully. Lionel was quite sorry for her, and went up to talk to her ; which Louisa felt to be a great relief. The ill-natured Molyneux's were delighted that, at last, even the *gentlemen* could remark Miss Louisa's flirtations ; really too bad a great deal, to sit for a whole hour *tête-à-tête* with such a wild young man as Lord George Fitzallan ; they thanked their kind stars they never did such things. Lady Anne was quite angry at this sort of scene ; it destroyed all ease and comfort : she thought it quite bad taste to notice any thing of the kind in a country-house. Men and women met to flirt, and it ruined all society if any thing said or done was to *tirer à conséquence*. But unfortu-

nately, Fate had decreed that the Goddess of Discord was to preside over this evening.

“ Miss Bevil,” said Lord Mordaunt, “ are not you a sworn ally of my cousin, Lady Hauton’s ?”

“ Oh !” said Mrs. Metcalf, sarcastically ; “ quite inseparables, Miss Bevil is never happy but with her ladyship.”

“ I am one of those,” replied Miss Bevil sharply, “ who am always well with those who use me well. But what of Lady Hauton ?”

“ Oh ! here is a vast deal about her in the papers, a puff upon the Queen of Fashion, as they call her. It seems she has been giving a dinner, roast beef and plumb puddings, to some charity children, at the Priory ; and then, in the evening, they had private theatricals before a large audience : tickets a guinea a-piece, which went to some infirmary,—I mean all the collection, and quite a large sum, too, they got :—a new way for people of fashion to be charitable gratis.—I say, Ma’am,” touching Lady Norbury’s arm to

rouse her from her nap ; “ what do you think of this new freak of Georgiana’s, acting for money ? ”

“ Oh, abominable ! ” said the Countess, half asleep still. “ I am quite out-ra-geous ; to disgrace herself in such a way ! ”

“ They are to act again next week, *The School for Scandal*, and *Sweethearts and Wives* : I see it is advertised.”

“ How like Georgiana ! ” said Lady Anne, “ just to make people stare. Then, I suppose, she will not assume the presidency of Almack’s till after Easter. I dare say she acts inimitably. Dear, how provoking ! that I should have just sealed my letter to her ; I should have told her to send me word all about it.”

“ I shall be able to satisfy your ladyship’s curiosity,” said Miss Bevil, in a determined voice, “ for I intend being at the next representation.”

All the party stared ; “ You ! ” said Lord Mordaunt, “ why, are you asked ? ”

“ I am on those terms with her ladyship, that

I flatter myself, I may offer to go to the Priory when I please."

"I think you will find yourself mistaken this time," said Lord Mordaunt; "why, the Morning Post says, there was not a bed to be had for ten miles round."

"I should think I was the best judge," said Miss Bevil sharply; "and I will lay you any money that I go."

"Oh, yes, go by all means! but you will not get in."

"Well, my lord, I will lay ten guineas that I both go and get in too."

"Done," said Lord Mordaunt, "but still you can't say you have been invited."

"Oh! what does that signify if I am received?"

"Besides," said Mrs. Metcalf, "Miss Bevil never waits for invitations, they come in too slow for her."

Lord Mordaunt laughed his most insulting laugh, and the lady was furiously angry.

“Never mind, Miss Bevil,” said Dr. Sloper, “you will write to dun his lordship for his ten guineas from the Priory, and then you will have far the best of it.”

Lady Norbury, surprising to relate, was actually quite roused by the noise, completely awake. She had listened in silence to what was going on, and at this moment she suddenly rose from her sofa, and, advancing to the party at the other end of the room, she said to Miss Bevil, “And so you really are going to the Priory; well, I must say you have chosen a good moment, when they are so gay, with so distinguished a party. I shall trouble you, however, with a line to Georgiana. I shall certainly tell her how much I disapprove these sort of theatricals. Profit is really so very ex-tra-or-di-na-ry a cir-cum-stance for people of fashion to think of. When do you leave us, Miss Bevil?”

“Oh dear,” said Lady Anne, “why you must go the day after to-morrow at latest, for the next play is to be on Friday.”

“And I,” said Lord Notbury, putting down his spectacles and taking out his snuff-box, “have a plan to propose for Miss Bevil’s approbation. I know that Monsieur L’Abbé Le Blanc has long wished to visit his interesting pupils, the three Ladies Beaulieu, at Etheringham Castle.” Here the Earl paused, and the complaisant Abbé, although he knew nothing of the matter, made the requisite bow of acquiescence, adding, “*Mi lor a raison, des demoiselles charmantes on ne peut pas plus aimables, remplies de bonté pour moi.*”

“Considering the unfortunate situation of these young ladies,” said the pompous earl, “it might not be strictly decorous that my friend Le Blanc,”—(Here came another very low bow from the Abbé at the honourable designation of friend,—“*Trop flatteur, trop aimable, reconnaissant au possible.*”)—“I say again,” continued his lordship, “it would not be altogether proper that the Abbé should visit at Etheringham when my Lord Beaulieu is absent, al-

though, I understand, there is always a very accomplished Italian lady resident with his daughters—a species of governess; that, by the way, which would not exactly meet my approbation. However, upon the present occasion, Lord Beaulieu is at home, and will, I am sure, be happy to receive the Abbé.” Here he paused and took snuff. What could be coming next? the company wondered.

“What I am going to mention is this:—my coachman informs me that, before the barouche goes to town, it must be inspected by the coachmaker at H——. Now, I would propose to the Abbé to take it so far, which is within a walk of Etheringham Castle. Perhaps, also, it might be agreeable to Miss Bevil to take a seat in it. She might even take it a stage further, say even to the Priory; it is only twenty miles from the city of H——, and if my coachman writes a line to the master of the hotel (which is the Inn I always go to), he will arrange about it without difficulty; so I hope, madam, this will

prove some accommodation, and save you from the disagreeable necessity of entering one of those vehicles termed hack-chaises, which, I should presume, at the Priory would not be allowed to drive up to the front door."

Miss Bevil bowed her thanks; she was half obliged and half affronted.

"And so, adieu my ten guineas!" said Lord Mordaunt.

"Will just pay for my journey," returned the lady, sitting down immediately to write her note to her "dear Lady Clifton," whilst Lord Norbury prepared the frank.

Thus was Miss Bevil's departure arranged *nolens volens*.

But the adventures of the evening were not yet concluded; for, just after this last arrangement had taken place, Lord Dorville and Lord George came in from the stables, where they had been to look after their hunters, and have some consultation with the grooms. They were both in the same story; Lightfoot had fallen

dead lame, and old Richard, the oracle of the stable, had declared it to be morally impossible that Dr. Sloper should mount him in the morning. The reverend gentleman seemed to care little about it; he was somewhat heavy; he should enjoy, quite as well, driving over to cover in his gig; he should see all the *beau monde* at Embley-rings. Monsieur L'Abbé's *jolie jument grise* was in high trim. Lord Norbury proposed going in the barouche himself: would any of the ladies favour him with their company? Lady Anne and Miss Mildmay both offered to go with his lordship. Would not Lady Anne do Lord Dorville the honour to accompany him in his curricule?—that would certainly be better still, and then Miss Molyneux could take her ladyship's place in the barouche.

Poor Miss Maria! Lady Norbury could not possibly spare her—and then she would see Sir Edward Barrington at dinner: that was certainly some consolation.

Mrs. Metcalf and Miss Bevil, of course, had

to pack, as nobody asked them. At last it was all settled.

The ladies were withdrawing, when Lord George begged to speak to Lady Anne. It was to ask if Miss Louisa Mildmay might not ride Lady Norbury's little pony to cover ; Lord George would promise to take care of her.

A pang of jealousy shot through Lady Anne's heart ; Colonel Montague would be there too. She paused for a moment ; the struggle was not longer, for her generous feelings got the better. " Let her be happy then," thought Lady Anne ; and she answered Lord George, " Yes, to be sure, will you give the necessary orders ?"

" Leave it to me," was his answer ; " and then, you know, Mrs. Metcalf can go in the barouche. Maria Molyneux will stay with your mother."

" True, true ! that will do much better for every body but papa—and he don't signify."

CHAPTER II.*

THE FOX CHACE.

“ All hail to the land where the foxes are flyers,
Where the fences are larger than any where else,
Where none value their necks, and if the horse tires,
Decline for the animal, not for themselves.”

Farewell to Leicestershire.

“ NINE o'clock, I protest !” said Lord Norbury, ringing the bell ; “ we must be off. Oh ! here is the barouche ; I thought the coachman knew my orders too well to be unpunctual.”

* As this chapter may be thought, in some respects, to resemble one in the late excellent novel of Granby, it may be as well to mention that it was written some time before the publication of that work, and has not even been retouched, otherwise it might be supposed to be an imitation.

Mrs. Metcalf, Miss Molyneux, and his lordship, got into the carriage immediately, and drove off in high style to Embley-rings. Next came Lord Dorville's famously appointed curri- cle: he had four beautiful roans, which matched perfectly, and on two of which his well appointed grooms were mounted. After looking at his equipage to see that all was right, with complacent satisfaction sparkling in his eyes, he handed in Lady Anne; who looked quite handsome enough to do honour to his lordship's choice. She gave a saucy look at old Taffey, the Welsh pony, which was just coming round to the door with Lord George's hack; followed by Dr. Sloper's very respectable-looking old-fashioned gig.

"I say," said Lord Dorville to his groom, "Jack, did Eclipse go off betimes?"

"Oh yes, my lord; nigh two hours ago, Eclipse and Dumbiedikes went together."

"And what horse does Colonel Montague ride?"

"Oh! he's on Truepenny, my lord; and

young Squire Mildmay on old Black Jack; they've been gone a good while."

Lady Anne heard, and was satisfied; she turned her head to see if Louisa was mounting; but the reins were at last arranged to Lord Dorville's satisfaction, and his beautiful roans set off at a famous pace.

"Now," said Lord George, "Dr. Sloper, we will see you and Miss Bevil off before we start, for there is nothing so horrid as following a string of carriages." Miss Bevil was somewhat heavy in the ankles, and the doctor none of the most alert; however, at last they were both in. Miss Bevil pulled down her black veil, and, what with her feathers and her rouge, she really looked very well. Lord George laughed as the creaking whiskey drove off, and Louisa could not but join him. "But come, Miss Mildmay," said his lordship; "now for old Taffey: he will carry you very nicely, I am sure, and we will go the short cut across the fields: we shall be at Embley-rings ten minutes before any of

them." But Louisa could have told him she did not care how long they were going.

How gay was the scene at Embley-rings!—red coats by dozens were seen scampering towards the place of rendezvous; those that were already arrived were bending over the arched necks of their sleek coursers, enjoying the gaiety of the sight, and anticipating the glories of the chase. A long line of carriages was drawn up on the heath, filled with all the beauty and fashion of the neighbourhood. The fineness of the weather had tempted many to do honour to the last day of the Merton Hunt; and the ladies, well protected from the keenness of the air by furs and veils, seemed to enjoy themselves full as much as the heroes of the other sex. The smartest among the fox-hunters were busied in paying their respects to the ladies in the different carriages; inspired by their smiles to be witty and impertinent, many an appropriate nickname was then conferred, and much tiny tittle-tattle breathed in soft

whispers, which the propitious winds wafted, a few hours afterwards, to the remotest corners of the county. A few fair equestrians were mingled among the gentlemen. Of these, none were so much noticed as the three Lady Beau-lieus: they were surrounded by a circle of admiring beaux. The Lord Lieutenant, in his coach and six, now drove up, his grace upon the box. The Duchess of Derwent, her daughter the Lady Mary, and Lord and Lady Tresilian, were in the carriage.

The Norbury train soon arrived, and, as Lord George had foretold, he and Miss Louisa Mildmay were the first. Then came all the speechifying and complimenting, the gentlemen anxiously looking out for their hunters, and the ladies for their acquaintance.

The conversation, if conversation it could be called, was rather desultory. Lord Dorville was asking every body for news, while Lady Anne was anxious to prove her extensive knowledge of sporting characters, by naming them

all, and nodding and smiling to many as they scampered by.

“How d’ye do, Colonel Trollope: you’re rather late, I think?—How bad the roads are, Mr. Wynyard!—That was an awkward leap, Mr. Heathcote; but that is such a beautiful creature you’re on!—Isn’t that Mr. Grant going over that hedge—Nosey Grant I mean?—Dear, how late these men are that I see riding down the hill; Mr. Harry Smith, Sir William Grandison, Mr. Bennet, and—who’s the fourth, my Lord?”

“How well Jack Townly looks on horse-back!” said Lord Dorville; “the best rider in England, nobody can deny that. How d’ye do, Mr. Townly?—a sharp morning!”

“Yes, yes! sharp enough, but no frost, thank Heaven!—How d’ye do, Lady Anne, where’s Lady Norbury?”

“Oh, at home! Mamma has no taste for this sort of thing.—Isn’t that Mr. Sydenham?—How d’ye do, how d’ye do?—so I see Mrs. and

Miss Sydenham have ventured out to enjoy this fine fresh breeze."

"Of course : probably they think the morning air is beneficial to the complexion : we came from Glenmore ; have been staying two nights there. My ladies persuaded the little marchioness to venture, not very wise *selon moi*, for the roads are so bad. But you know when once a woman has taken a thing into her head, there is no help for it."

"Oh fie, Mr. Sydenham ! that is not like your usual gallantry."

"But you have heard the news, Lady Anne, about Lady Glenmore ; the hopes : of course, you have been let into the secret ; faith, it is already *le secret de la comedie*. There can be no doubt whatever : but she's sadly delicate, I fear."

"Was Lord Hazlemere staying at Glenmore Place ?"

"No ! he was gone to look after an estate he has near Weldon Regis : he'd been staying

there some time, and returns to-day. Monstrous odd, I think, altogether! I should like to have met him."

"How are you, Sydenham?" said a young man who now galloped by on a fine chesnut mare, and splashed the mud right and left.

"A fine scenting day! isn't it, Stewart? we shall have a capital run, I hope," returned his friend.

"Who's that?" said Lady Anne.

"Dear! don't you know the handsome Stewart? why, all the women are dying for him. I had to trot him up just now, that Lady Agnes Beaulieu might have a look at him: she and her sisters were mad to see him. That's our new member, Colonel Montague, isn't it? a fine-looking fellow, faith! and he's well mounted. But I must go and speak to the duke, so good morning, ladies;" and away trotted Mr. Sydenham.

Lady Anne and Louisa now joined the other ladies in the barouche, for Lord George and

Lord Dorville had to mount, and their high-mettled hunters had been walking up and down the heath for a long time.

Lord Dorville was unusually gay; the bustle had even interest enough to rouse his torpid faculties: "I say, George," exclaimed his lordship, "don't Eclipse look well? now tell me if you don't think him a handsomer horse than Dumbiedikes?"

"I do," said Lord George; "but Dumbie has more spirit; Eclipse wouldn't carry Mordaunt half as well, he's a stone heavier than you."

"That's a nice bit of blood, Colonel Montague has got there."

"Yes, that's one of my uncle's last purchases; and Lionel deserves a good horse, he's a crack rider, I can tell you."

"Whose barouche is this, George? a neat turn-out, faith—capital good goers those four blacks.—Oh! I see, it's the Sydenham's carriage; they're always in style. A fine girl the daughter; and the mother too, quite a dasher!"

“Too much so for my taste—but see how *empresé* Mordaunt is to pay his devoirs, he has even left Dumbiedikes to go up to them !”

“Which is it he’s after ?” enquired Lord Dorville.

“That’s just what no one knows, for he’s equally attentive to both mother and daughter ?”

“Hey-day ! who comes here, I wonder ?—Sir Edward Barrington in his old, battered German calèche, the same he travelled in last year to Bareges.”

“A stingy old fellow !” said Lord George ; “I wish his gout had kept him there—I wonder when he will sport a new vehicle. I think I had better sell him my old Berlin waggon ; I would back it against that old tub. I say, Dorville, do you think Miss Maria Molyneux will hook the old bachelor ?”

“’Pon honour can’t say :—but I vow here is Lord Glenmore with his four-in-hand, and her ladyship inside too ; what a pretty creature—as fresh as a rose !”

“ Yes ; the beauty of sixteen, but no expression. I admire the other *belle* much more.”

“ What, Lady Tresilian ! But she is so monstrous large : why she would break down the springs of my curricie !”

“ Oh ! Lady Anne is certainly lighter,” said Lord George, laughing : “ and will suit you much better, but Lady Tresilian has a fine face ; so much soul and genius in those large blue eyes of hers !”

“ What’s the matter now ?” said Lord Dorville. “ Oh, I see, Lord Norbury is presenting Colonel Montague to the Duke of Derwent, and now to the ladies. How confounded ugly Lady Mary is !”

“ And see how Mrs. Sydenham is making up to Lady Glenmore ; the two carriages drawn up close together. Such a toad-hunting, I’ll be sworn ; and Mordaunt the go-between. The old Marquis is mounted, I see :—a fine-looking old man, is not he ? but looks more like the grandfather than the husband of that little fairy.”

“ And who is that now bowing with such irresistible grace to Lady Glenmore ? such a wonderful old beau—quite a Lord Foppington ! ”

“ Oh ! that,” said Lord George, “ is the famous Mr. Sydenham, as thorough an old sinner as lives, I believe. You know he goes by the name of lying Sydenham. No one ever heard him speak a word of truth.”

“ But, hark ! there ’s the horn.”

The cheering sound re-echoed through the wood, and all was joy and wild confusion.

“ The fox is off ! ” exclaimed Lord George ; “ he breaks away : there he goes ; I see him ! I see him ! ”

Reynard burst off in grand style ; but faithful to the track, and close at his heels, the many-coloured hounds were seen darting along the prickly furze towards a thick copse. The huntsman was issuing his orders to the whippers-in ; the horn sounded again ; and instantly every horseman rushed towards the wood.

To give my readers some idea of the glories

of this famous day's sport, of which the annals of the Merton Hunt, since the days of old Sir Everard Montague, afford no parallel, I must here present them with the account which appeared in the Merton weekly paper, supposed to proceed from the pen of the Reverend Samuel Sloper, D.D., Rector of Stratford-cum-Lacy, and chaplain to the Right Honourable the Earl of Norbury :—

“ Scarcely had the hounds entered the cover, when a well-known voice proclaimed the traitor found: at first he tried his old established haunts; but finding all subterfuge vain, he gallantly faced the open field, with the whole pack close at his brush, making, as it seemed, for Merton Lees; then turning sharply round, he skirted Felton Wood, crossed Horsely Common, and passed on towards Atherford. Few, out of the very large field, were now able to keep up with the fleet pack. Lord Mordaunt, on his favourite Dumbiedikes, Mr. Sydenham, and Colonel Montague, were all who could be fairly

said to keep up with the hounds, so as to trace their progress towards the river Ather. Reynard crossed it in high style, and kept along the top of the banks till he came to Weldon Regis Bridge, which he darted across, and then made an immense circuit towards Norbury. The race was now continued in the park : and here a sad spectacle presented itself, of tired horses and breathing of veins. The huntsman, Messrs. Mildmay, Carlton, Bennet, and the above-mentioned nobleman and gentlemen, were alone able to follow the determined pack close by the house at Norbury ; two miles beyond which they turned back by Clayford, to Springfield Wood, where a fresh fox saved the life of his devoted brother. This *surprising* run of an hour and a half, from finding to the whipping off of the hounds, furnished an hour of the hardest racing, without a fall, that was ever seen. The distance was not less than fourteen miles. Lord Mordaunt's horse failed him near his own door ; but a fresh one soon enabled

him to recover the hounds below Clayford. With his wonted kind attention, his lordship sent out his grooms to administer to the distresses of his brother sportsmen in the field, who quickly found for themselves and their tired horses the most ample refreshment his hospitality could bestow.

“ Several of the horses suffered severely from the day's work; and a very valuable one, belonging to Mr. Sydenham, was so much fatigued by its exertions, that it died the next day. The Duchess of Derwent, the Marchioness of Glenmore, and the Lady Anne Norbury, had each large parties with them. It might be truly said, that all the beauty and fashion of the neighbourhood were collected, and the ladies evinced the most striking solicitude for the fate of the day. In the admiration they expressed for the intrepid feats they witnessed, was fully exemplified,—

“ That none but the brave deserve the fair.”

The party all assembled before dinner at Norbury, in high spirits with their wonderful sport. Some, indeed, were a good deal fatigued, as might reasonably be expected; others were very much distressed at the state of many of the horses; and all were hungry in a most uncommon degree.

At length Mr. Mrs. and Miss Sydenham made their *entrée*, just as Lord Norbury thought it was quite impossible his appetite could wait any longer for dinner; and, of course, his lordship rallied his somewhat subdued spirits, to greet his favourite *belles* with proper politeness.

Mrs. Sydenham possessed all the grace and elegance compatible with an air of decided fashion, and the taste she always displayed in her dress was the result of much study and combination; but the effect of the whole was an appearance of perfect ease and nature. The advantages which time had generously spared her, she permitted to be observed; but all open display, at her age, she deemed *mauvais ton*.

The dress of her daughter was always to be in contrast with her own. If Mrs. Sydenham looked the queen, in imperial purple,—the slender Laura adopted virgin white. When, in a pensive mood, the dignified matron set the fashion in *feuille-morte*, her blooming daughter adopted the gayer hue of the lilac or the rose.

To-day Mrs. Sydenham gave to elegant white satin a grace unknown before: though past forty, her hair was still beautiful, and therefore she ventured to appear without a cap. Her maid had done her full justice, and she was really *still* a very fine woman. Laura, for a whim, was in deep crimson, with a Turkish turban. Mrs. Sydenham was covered with ornaments, her daughter had not one. A handsome girl of eighteen may wear any thing; 'tis she adorns the dress. Laura knew this well, and yet she was not near so fine a woman as her mother——had been.

Mr. Sydenham, who followed the ladies, was,

as usual, the very pink of dandyism, in a new uniform of the Merton Hunt, made after his own particular directions: he was exceedingly proud of his fine-formed legs and his graceful bows, and, wherever he was, his *entrée* always made a sensation. Sir Harcourt Beresford came soon after; he was a handsome, foreign-looking youth, wore immense black whiskers; he had a rather interesting expression of face, very fine teeth, and consequently was always endeavouring to show them. His hands were almost lost in his wrist-bands; he took a vast deal of snuff from a fine Mosaic box, which had a beautiful view on it, and which played several waltzes. He seemed quite a *distingué*, and his air and his looks proclaimed him,

“Charm’d with his various properties to please.”

He immediately placed himself behind Miss Sydenham’s chair, and hung over her in a graceful *degagée* manner. He was evidently a would-be *attentif*, and whispered his pretty

speeches in a singular jargon of French, Italian, and German, mixed with now and then a little English.

Sir Edward Barrington was a blunt country squire, of the old school, very rich, very gouty, and very proud of being one of the members for the County of H——. He had always been in love with some fair lady or other, but had never committed matrimony. Would Miss Maria Molyneux have sufficient influence to make him pass the Rubicon? That was a question the boldest would hardly venture to determine. The young lady certainly did not doubt her powers, and her eyes sparkled with unusual pleasure, when Sir Edward, in his great shoe, hobbled into the room, leaning on Lord Mordaunt's arm. Miss Maria, of course, wished to know all the news of the chase: she was dying to hear who were in the field, who were spilt, who were in at the death; which way the fox went, what flirtations went on at the place of rendezvous, and all such questions as ladies always ask on such occa-

sions; and the Baronet was delighted to hear his own voice, and laugh at his own wit. Lionel, who happened to be in a corner by himself, from whence he could, unobserved, see and hear all that was going on, was amused with remarking Lord Mordaunt's unusual *empressement* of manner to Mrs. Sydenham; she was all eyes for him, all ears for Lord Norbury, she was every thing to both of them.

Mr. Sydenham meanwhile, with true tact, was discovering the exact state of Lady Norbury's nerves, and modifying the silver tones of his voice so as to captivate her ear. Then he talked of some of her ladyship's Irish cousins, whom he had the honour to know intimately, which, by the way, was a complete falsehood. In a circuitous manner, he got back to the time when the Countess, as Lady Emily Fitzallan, had been the reigning *belle* at Dublin: hinted at one or two unfortunate friends of his to whom she had been cruel; and it was all said so easily,

and with such an air of truth, that Lady Norbury was quite pleased. How few there are who can resist judicious flattery !

With Lady Anne he had wit at will ; Louisa he ogled with tolerable assurance, and, when near enough for her to hear, he complimented Lady Anne on the beauty of her friend—a striking likeness of his old toast, the beautiful Lady Arabella Smith.

“ Delightful place the Priory ! ” continued Mr. Sydenham, as soon as they were seated at table. “ Nothing can be so delicious as the style in which Lord and Lady Hauton receive their guests ;—such true *ton* ! such complete ease ! Upon my veracity, now, I was there a fortnight, and never spoke to either of them : I did not go to see *them*, you know ; no, by Jove ! I have enough of them in London. I went to see their party. Then, you know, there one must always be paired ; otherwise it doesn't do at all. Monstrous good plan now, for a man who's thinking of noosing himself, to be paired at the

Priory with any girl he may be thinking of: it would be a way to see how they like each other; don't you think so, Beresford?"

"*Der Teüfel,*" said Sir Harcourt; "*mais pardonnez, I think the plan un poco trop libre, il cecisbeo d'Italia.*"

"Would you believe it, Lady Norbury?" said Mr. Sydenham; "Lord Hauton's son, little Lord Deloraine, hunted with us twice last month at the Priory."

"Impossible! Georgiana never could be so absurd; why the boy is only six years old!"

"But I assure you he hunts: and so does his nurse, a monstrous fat heavy woman; she has broke the backs of two ponies already. By the by, Lord Norbury, Lady Hauton begged me to ask you if you could procure her a good stout Welsh galloway, who could carry Mrs. Nurse safely?"

"Her ladyship does me too much honour," said the Earl: "but I must make the commission over to Mordaunt. I really have too much

business to attend to all Lady Hauton's most extraordinary requests. Mighty absurd indeed! to have a child hunt with his nurse! A ridicule upon fox hunting: I should fear it might hurt Lord Hauton's interest in the Borough of Roughley considerably; but really, her success at Almack's has turned Lady Hauton's head: she is now the lady patroness of every whim."

"But she is a charming creature," said Mrs. Sydenham to Lord Norbury; "and so perfectly correct, and all that sort of thing. One could not help feeling a little for her, when Lord Hauton was always with Mrs. Frederick Percival,—such attentions, such waltzing, and romping! I was really sorry my Laura should see such things, for the innocence of youth lasts so short a time," said Mrs. Sydenham in a plaintive tone.

Mr. Sydenham, who was a great frequenter of the club at Merton, entertained the company with many good stories of what was going on

there. He had much to tell of certain noted characters, who were "cunning in cattle," and he never had any objection "to laugh at the folly of those he caressed." Whatever the matter might be, he had certainly the art of making his stories irresistibly entertaining, by his manner and expression, to most of the company. Lady Norbury, indeed, now that he had left off talking of her relations, thought it too vulgar to contaminate her ears with listening to his slang; she wondered that a man pretending to any sort of fashion could condescend to use such very shocking language; she, therefore, commenced an interesting conversation with Lord Dorville upon the wholesomeness of made dishes with regard to digestion: all the opinions of all her Ladyship's favourite physicians were brought forward on this occasion. Lord Dorville merely answered, "Very true," "Perhaps," "Right," and "Ha!" when he could not help it; he was busily employed in trying his digestive powers, first with

“*potage au rix à la Turque* ;” next with “*filet de bœuf sauté aux truffes* ;” he was now occupied with “*riz de veau à la financière*,” but was meditating an attack on a “*paté de foie gras*,” which graced the side-table.

Monglas had to-day exerted himself to the utmost to be as foreign as possible, in compliment to Mr. Sydenham, who was known to possess that inestimable treasure, a famous French cook.

In a little time the witty Sydenham began to think the company monstrous flat ; they wanted rousing : he was tired of Lord Norbury’s pompous prosing about nothing, Lord Mordaunt was too solemn, Lord Dorville too dull, Lord George Fitzallan too mischievous, Colonel Montague too sensible, Sir Harcourt Beresford too sentimental, Godfrey Mildmay too argumentative, Sir Edward Barrington too old-fashioned, Doctor Sloper too parsonic. Whom then should he address ? He singled out the unfortunate Abbé Le Blanc as his victim : he was only too com-

plimentary and too good-natured. He began by whispering something across Mrs. Metcalf to Doctor Sloper. The joke seemed a good one, for that portly lady laughed immoderately, as well as her beaux right and left.

The subject proved to be the Abbé's unfortunate *jolie jument grise*, which he had named the Duchesse de Berri; Mr. Sydenham's ludicrous description of which continued to furnish amusement to the company on all sides for some considerable time.

CHAPTER III.

A FEMALE COTERIE.

“ In various talk, th’ instructive hours they past,
Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last ;
One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
And one describes a charming Indian screen ;
A third interprets motion, looks, and eyes,
At every word a reputation dies ;
Snuff, or the fan, supply the place of chat,
With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that.”

POPE

How well Pope knew the sex ! and how exactly they continue the same in our day that they were in his ! Except that few now take snuff, at least ostentatiously, the above description is a perfectly correct account of the sort of amiable tittle-tattle which takes place in every drawing-room, in the female committee, immediately

after dinner, when it is rather too soon for the fair ones to employ themselves in reading, working, or music. I challenge any woman, young or old, to deny it if she dare.

“What a witty agreeable creature Sydenham is!” said great broad Mrs. Metcalf, as she planted herself with her back to the fire, in the small drawing-room; “now he is what I term a monstrous pleasant companion. He has seen the world, and knows men and manners too.”

“You are always so kindly partial to him, my dear friend,” said Mrs. Sydenham, throwing herself into a bergère arm-chair with graceful *nonchalance*; the elegance of her attitude contrasting happily with the vulgarity of her friend’s. “But, indeed, I do think men of a certain age, far superior to the dandies of the present day; now, of the age of Lord Norbury and Mr. Sydenham. I am sure your ladyship must think so?” with an appealing look at Lady Norbury.

“It is astonishing how few men of any

age are agreeable to my taste," returned the countess, sulkily; "but I believe I am very difficult to please."

"Young men for my money," said Miss Bevil, with a decided tone, arranging her *toque* by the glass over the chimney-piece; "I will leave the old to those who like them."

"For my part," said Miss Sydenham, "I think both agreeable in their different ways. I declare upon my word now, I should not be able to say which I prefer, young men or old ones."

"My dearest love," returned her mother, "do not be ashamed of such enviable ignorance. Happy girl! long may you be able to boast such delightful indifference; for when once *le cœur a parlé*," with a sigh, "there is always such a change!"

This sentiment was addressed to Miss Molyneux, who answered with a very vacant smile; for she had hardly heard it all, having been occupied in examining Mrs. Sydenham's *belle*

chévelure ; she wanted to detect how the false hair was so cunningly fastened on as nearly to elude all possible suspicion.

Lady Anne wrote in pencil on a slip of paper, and passed it to Louisa, "Ignorance is not innocence ; even when genuine." Her friend added underneath,

"Le sage entend à demi mot,"

and returned it. Then Lady Anne wrote :

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

Miss Maria Molyneux, with her Argus eyes, glanced askance at this *commerce d'esprit*, this interchange of slips of paper.

"*Bouts rimés*," said Lady Anne, carelessly. "I was trying my wit against Louisa ; but she beats me quite hollow, as Lord Dorville would say ;" and she tore the paper to pieces, and threw the fragments into the fire. "There, part is burnt,

'The rest the Fates disperse in empty air.'

Where did I get that line from, I wonder?
Oh, from Homer, Pope's Homer, I mean."

"From Flaxman's Illustrations, I should think," said Louisa; "I saw the book on the table yesterday, and, as I remember seeing that line, probably your ladyship met with it there also."

"Beat again," said Lady Anne; "foiled on my own 'vantage-ground: really, Louisa, you are a dangerous friend, what with your wit, *esprit*, memory, and all your accomplishments—you are—"

"Oh! stop, stop! my dear Lady Anne, I must hide my face if you go on."

"Oh! I must and will go on," said her ladyship, with the true spirit of a spoiled lady of quality, wholly regardless of the feelings of others.

"I pronounce, Louisa, that you are—"

"And I," interrupted Louisa, "pronounce it all flattery, flattery, flattery!"

“Do stop her, Miss Maria, for Heaven’s sake!”

Miss Maria Molyneux looked very cross; she hated Louisa Mildmay for being more admired than she ever was herself: her only consolatory reflection was, that “Men are, after all, strange capricious creatures, no accounting for their tastes.”

Strange indeed it would be, if the first bloom of youth, with every grace, natural and acquired, were not always sure of being preferred to the frowns, wrinkles, and ill-humour, attendant on a disappointed maiden of thirty-five. It is, indeed, a little too hard, if

“For every fault that woman has,
Poor man must bear the blame.”

“You are really a charming girl, my dear Laura,” said Mrs. Metcalf to Miss Sydenham, as she patted her playfully on the back; “good eyes, good teeth, good complexion, and a good

fortune into the bargain ; what can any man in his senses want more ? Well, and I think I have found out something, too ; not that I pretend to be a conjuror in the least ; not like old Lady Lochaber, who says she can pronounce point blank, when a match will take place hereafter, from the manner of two people to each other the first time they meet at a dinner. But seriously now, without second sight, I think I have discovered your secret :—and now don't blush ; but I admire your taste of all things. Very gentlemanly indeed, *l'air noble tout-à-fait*. I thought that pretty red turban could not be so well put on—without—some little *projet*."

" My dearest Mrs. Metcalf, what is that you are saying ?" said Mrs. Sydenham in her falsetto tone, with the softest air imaginable ; " indeed I must not have you run away with such an idea. I assure you, upon my word, that Sir Harcourt Beresford is merely an intimate acquaintance, nothing more indeed ; Laura and he saw a good deal of each other abroad.

He travelled with us through Germany, and then we often met him afterwards at Rome and Naples, but that is all. Of course now they must have a good deal to tell each other ; but it is all about drawing, and *vertu*, music, and foreign manners. Such topics now are so general, in these days of universal travel !” with an appealing look to the circle.

“ And so common-place too !” said Lady Anne, sarcastically. “ One is really quite tired of touring and tourists ; it is now a treat to meet with any girl who has not been corrupted with foreign notions. Like me, for instance, who know nothing beyond foggy, smoky London. I think I must have so much *naïve* ignorance.”

Louisa laughed at this sally. Miss Molyneux stared with real surprise, though she had a sort of idea that it must be meant ironically.

“ Lady Anne Norbury,” said Mrs. Sydenham, “ is certain to charm in any character ; but we less favoured mortals, who cannot hope,

like her ladyship, to attract by the *agrémens* of ignorance,—we must stoop to learn if we would wish to rise.”

“Pray, then, rise immediately,” said Mrs. Metcalf, “and let me admire the trimming at the bottom of your gown: that *blonde* is really beautiful. And so, my pretty Laura, you only talk to Sir Harcourt on common-place topics. Well, well! you’re both young enough, and have plenty of time before you; and, as I always tell young people, these mutualities marshal the way. I have seen enough of flirtations and those sort of things in my time, to know a little about the matter.”

The fair Laura smiled. “Now own, Mrs. Metcalf,” said she, “that Lady Margaret Carlton put this idea into your head? She is always tormenting me by finding out my flirtations. I do declare, if I only speak twice to a man, if he is but young, she always sets it down as a settled thing.”

“Just like her; but I am afraid she will

scrutinize a thousand and one flirtations before ever she will catch a settlement for either of her two tall disagreeable daughters. Odious girls! I can tell them their style will never do, they had better change it whilst there's time."

"Indeed," replied the candid Laura, "I must say that I do not think the Miss Carltons go exactly the right way to succeed. Let me see, how old are they now? why, Apollonia has been out these eight years, and Charlotte Augusta is full four years older than I am. Unless," added this kind friend, laughing, "the name of the Duke of Clanalpin can raise up some lovers for these poor girls, I know not what can or will be done."

Mrs. Sydenham now requested her daughter would go up stairs for her music-book, which was a real treasure, containing some undoubted originals in manuscript, both by Rossini and Weber, geniuses of whom good Mrs. Metcalf knew nothing, but of course she would be delighted to hear these things. Laura tripped off,

and Miss Molyneux followed her, in order to examine more fully the trimming upon her dress.

Mrs. Sydenham then addressed Mrs. Metcalf in a sort of audible whisper, her eyes wandering all the time towards Lady Anne and Louisa, to ascertain if they heard. "My dear good friend, I must beg you will not say any thing more about Sir Harcourt Beresford to Laura, she is so happily unsuspecting at present ; and pray contradict the report whenever you hear it mentioned, for I am told it is much about just now. Young men always hate to have their real attentions commented upon ; and should there, indeed, be any thing in it, of which I am not at all at present certain, still it might not do. An Irish son-in-law might not suit Mr. Sydenham's views, or mine, for our dear girl. Rent-rolls in that country are often only nominal ; and then, before the settlements are quite arranged, one never can feel certain of any thing. And besides——"

Here her voice sank quite, and the two ladies' heads nearly joined.

Lady Anne and Louisa heard all that was intended for them to hear, and then they exchanged looks.

“*Entre nous*,” continued Mrs. Sydenham, in a more audible key; “those Carltons are the torments of my poor Laura’s life. So jealous of any attentions paid to her: so curious, too, to discover how *we manage* to get so often to Almack’s; because, poor souls, they are so often refused: wondering how I contrived to visit all the lady patronesses. Then, if I happen to meet Lady Margaret at a ball, she is watching whom Laura dances with; and if she fancies she can detect any body paying her any attention, up she comes directly to abuse the man to me—her brother the duke thinks him so vulgar, or Clanalpin cannot bear him; he did not go down at Mac Ivor Tower, she can assure me. And then one gets so sick of all her hosts of cousins, all those Clans and Macs.”

Lady Anne, with her usual readiness, immediately repeated those two well-known lines :

“ That bootless host of high-born beggars,
Macleans, Mackenzies, and Macgregors.”

“ I used to see a great deal of Lady Margaret Carlton formerly,” said Mrs. Sydenham, pursuing the thread of her discourse : “ before our girl grew up, we were great friends. I believe she found the society at our house agreeable ; and really, in her unfortunate situation, so poor, with so very large a family, Mr. Sydenham and I felt quite rejoiced that we should be able to contribute to her amusement.”

“ How like you !” said Mrs. Metcalf ; and the good old lady was beginning an ominous “ I remember well,” when Lady Anne gave vent to a long-drawn groan. Mrs. Sydenham heard it, and, rising from the sofa, she advanced towards Lady Norbury, in order to admire the colour of some scarlet worsted which her ladyship was occupied in winding : the com-

plaisant and useful Maria was holding the skein. "What a lovely colour!—the real French *ponceau*, I suppose, from Weldon's in Welbeck-street."

"No, indeed! she is so dear," replied Miss Maria, "that I always patronize the Golden Ball in Pall Mall, which is much more reasonable."

"Miss Maria Molyneux is so kind as to intend knitting me a turban," said Lady Norbury, "like one that Lady Agnes Beaulieu has been doing for Lady Glenmore: red, with stripes of gold."

"Oh, how beautiful!" replied Mrs. Sydenham, "it will be as striking as Lady Agnes herself. What lovely girls those three sisters are! I predict that they will make rare havoc with the hearts of half the men in town, this spring."

"What a sad business that was!" observed Mrs. Metcalf,—“that affair of the mother's with Major Devereux. I think I never re-

member a thing of the kind making such a noise in the world. I hear they are wretchedly poor now; and he uses her like a dog, too: they live somewhere in the south of France in great misery. Poor woman! to be sure, she never liked Lord Beaulieu; she married him for his rank and etceteras, but every body knew she was in love all the time with that handsome, good-for-nothing Devereux. When she ran off with him, I remember her saying, 'Well, this time, I have pleased my eye to plague my heart;' and so she did, to be sure; such a *roué* as that man always has been!"

"Poor Alicia!" said Lady Norbury, "she might have been happy, though;" and she gave a deep sigh. "I must ever pity her, and feel for her, however guilty she may be." And she took out her handkerchief, and wiped her eyes as if she were weeping.

The company looked all surprise.

Presently Lady Norbury rose and left the room; Lady Anne followed her.

“ There, Mrs. Metcalf,” said Miss Bevil, looking up from a novel she was reading: “ you see you have done it now. It was a pity you had not forgotten that story among all your recollections; it might have been spared.”

“ Why, in the name of wonder, what have I done ?”

“ You who know so much about every thing, and every body, it is odd that you should not remember that Lady Norbury herself was supposed to be much attached to Lord Beaulieu, before he succeeded to the title; but he was very poor, and so her father forced her to marry Lord Norbury, quite against her will, but he was a *meilleur parti*, and besides, not a Catholic. Lord Beaulieu wore the willow for a long time, and then fell in love with Lady Alicia Dillon: she was cousin to Lady Norbury, and thought very like her; and she was overpersuaded by all her friends, but particularly by Lady Norbury, to take him, though she was then half engaged to this very Devereux; but

he happened to be in India at that time with his regiment, and you know the old proverb, '*Les absens ont toujours tort.*' "

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Metcalf, "how very unlucky that I should just allude to this affair! But how could I be supposed to guess that my Lady Norbury had ever loved or cared for any thing in this world but herself? Why could not some one of you give me a hint?"

"Indeed," said Miss Bevil, "I coughed loud enough to have frightened any body, besides hemming several times."

"And I touched your elbow, and your foot too," said Mrs. Sydenham. "How provoking it was that I should have admired the colour of that red worsted!"

"Well, well, it can't be helped now, but this explains to me why Lady Norbury used always to chaperon the eldest of the Lady Beaulieus, Lady Olivia, last year. Every body thought it such an extraordinary condescension in her ladyship, really quite surprising."

“ Oh, but then she is such a beautiful girl !” said Mrs. Sydenham.

“ Lord ! my dear, I don’t think her or any of them to compare with your Laura ; certainly pretty, but no style ; no pretensions to my god-daughter’s manner.”

“ Now you really flatter, my dear Mrs. Metcalf ! I do own, that I think my Laura very charming ;—the fond heart of a too fond parent may, perhaps, be pardoned for seeing with too partial eyes ; but still maternal partiality must not make me blind, and the three Lady Beaulieus are thought by the men, I am told, so regularly beautiful, and very agreeable besides.”

“ Are they indeed ? well, then, I have done ; for men are always my ultimatum in matters of taste. But though they don’t presume to tell you, yet I imagine you can see what they think of your sweet daughter. I own I am proud of my god-child.”

“ Ah ! you kind creature ! you know the

way to my heart; but don't flatter me too much about that dear girl."

"Let me tell you, then, what I think of those three Lady Beaulieus," said Mrs. Metcalf. "They have a monstrous deal of blood about them, with very high manners; when one sees them out any where, with all the most prancing people in town, your very first-rate people, they still hold their heads higher than any of them. I saw them at some squeeze in town: though the eldest only was what is called fairly out, yet they all three attracted general observation by their dash and style. I was asked repeatedly who those three beauties were."

"Oh, I dare say you were; it does not surprise me in the least: your dashers always strike at first sight. Now, with my Laura, I have always cried down that sort of bold style; my aim for her is that she should please; I wish her to captivate, not to strike. What have women to do, but to charm by winning grace?"

"I wish you would preach that doctrine to

your friend Lady Margaret Carlton," said Mrs. Metcalf, laughing.

"Unfortunate woman! she is so disappointed by the failure of her matrimonial expectations! And she does hate those three Lady Beaulieus so violently! I fancy because they have treated her with some of those prancing manners you were talking about;—thank you for the word!"

"But I said, prancing people."

"Yes, but it is equally applicable to manners. Depend upon it, the Beaulieus have quizzed the Carltons' gowns or steps; or, perhaps, have let out that Lady Margaretta has generally been refused every set for Almack's, and so has been forced to content herself with one or two of the charity balls as a *pis aller*. Then, I dare say they have refused that beau of beaux Adolphus Frederick, as a partner in town, though they may have taken up with him in the country. I must say, on all occasions the Ladies Beaulieu pay particular attention to my Laura; and that she, without any rank, or pretension

to it, should be preferred to the Miss Carltons, the grand-daughters of the Duke of Clanalpin, is an offence never to be forgiven by Lady Margaret. And what makes it so good is, that really, just now, *en fait de société*, the Clanalpin set is far from being *du premier ton*: the Duke of Middleburgh's and Lord Hauton's set, if you please; but the Duke of Clanalpin is quite one of your country-gentlemen grandees, who kills his own mutton, and lives a great deal in the country among the natives—almost as *mauvais ton* and twaddling, as our neighbours at Derwent Vale."

During this long and confidential discourse all the other ladies had withdrawn, which afforded Mrs. Sydenham and Mrs. Metcalf an admirable opportunity for passing judgment on their friends in the house, after they had done with those in the neighbourhood.

"Whom did Lady Margaret talk about chiefly when she was here?" inquired Mrs. Syden-

ham, "what unlucky family fell under her especial displeasure?"

"Oh, that great, rich, vulgar Lady Birmingham is the person she envies most just now: we heard of nothing else, greatly to the horror of Lady Norbury, to whom the very name of Birmingham is poison."

"What! the people who live at Atherford Abbey? Well, I must say they are curiosities. I understand, however, that they are to commence their London career in grand style after Easter—'to dance into the world' on a fiddlestick,' as my dear old friend the Duchess of Gordon used to say. My lady is vulgar past imagination; the little baronet a perfect fool, and mercantile to the back-bone; and the Miss, of course, is to be a thorough Dandina,—but in these days what does that signify? Great, fat Lady Birmingham will be presented, of course: a blaze of diamonds, so as perhaps even to excite the curiosity of his Majesty. Well, then she will give a great ball, and some first-rate

exclusive will ask the company: if she manages well, Lady Hauton, who is certainly the queen of fashion—"the Countess," as she is called, in the patronesses set. Of course none of the Birminghams' friends or cronies will be permitted to come: thus she will cut all her vulgars, and in one night become the dear friend of all the patronesses. Oh! we all know that money can and will do every thing; it will even open the doors of Almack's. Will the people here countenance her, do you think?"

"Oh, there's no telling about them. Lady Anne is all caprice; and Lady Norbury so uncommonly odd,—if they don't get on with other people, she will very likely patronize them in order to be singular; just now she abominates them all, because my lord has taken them up. However, Miss Birmingham is really a handsome girl; I saw her at that election ball at Merton last week. She is the sworn friend of these Mildmays; and now that this Colonel Montague is in such high favour here, and

brought forward by them, the whole coterie may very likely advance; indeed, I, for one, expect it."

"My lady desires that you may be let know the tea waits, Ma'am," said the groom of the chambers, with true official solemnity.

"We are coming directly, Mr. Fudge," said Mrs. Metcalf, rising slowly from her seat. "Oh, there is Laura's charming voice."

"Yes," said Mrs. Sydenham; "that is a beautiful thing she is singing:—it is an Italian song, and afterwards I shall beg her to give us one of my favourite airs."

CHAPTER IV.

FRESH ARRANGEMENTS AND FRESH VISITORS.

“Le mieux reçu n'est pas toujours le plus chéri.”

MOLIERE'S *Le Dépit Amoureux*.

“OH, my dear Louisa,” said Lady Anne, as they met in the morning on the stairs, “think what a piece of luck—old Mr. Molyneux is returned to Oakwood Hall, from Brighton, very ill, and he has sent his carriage to take the Misses back: he cannot do without them at home, it seems, to nurse him, and they are in such despair! packing up their things! The carriage stayed all night at Merton, and so was here by dawn of day; they have had an early

breakfast already, and they will be off in half an hour; I am so delighted."

"I thought they had been great friends of your ladyship's," said Louisa, somewhat coldly.

"Oh dear, yes, decided cronies; but they have been here now so long, that I am beginning to be quite tired of them; I have seen all their different dresses, and have heard all their stories, and know all their quadrilles and waltzes by heart. Next year they will have replenished their store, and learnt some new stitches, and I hope the old gentleman won't die this time! If he should recover soon, I shall think his illness has been very useful; for really now, Louisa, you must allow, those two girls would have been quite *de trop* with the Derwents and Glenmores. With the natives, one must do them the justice to say they are very useful: that is the reason why mamma is so very fond of Miss Maria; she is by far the cleverest: Dora, I do think stupidity itself. But why so grave, fair lady?"

“ I was thinking, that if your ladyship is always tired of your friends when you know their gowns, perhaps I may also be *de trop* in a few days.”

“ Jealous, I declare; as if I ever could class my trusty and well-beloved friend and counsellor, Louisa Mildmay, with those two stupid girls. But, bless me! what a colour you have got! how becoming a little touch of anger is to you, Louisa; I vow it makes you look quite divine. Oh! here come the Miss Molyneux's, ready bonneted; and the carriage too, packed up in every corner, is coming round: now you must help me to be civil.—My dear Miss Molyneux, I am so grieved to lose you both in this way. Miss Maria, would you like to take any thing with you in the carriage? some sandwiches, perhaps, or biscuits, to put into the pockets? I desired Fudge to put in the music, and pray keep it till we meet next year. I do hope you will find Mr. Molyneux much better: write me word, Maria, as soon as you can.

Will you like to take home Walter Scott's new novel? I will send you that French book as soon as that tiresome Lady Margaret Carlton returns it to me; and when I get to town I will order you any thing new of Rossini's, or of any of the Scotch writers. Well! my dear friends, if you must go! Adieu! fare you well! Remember us kindly to Mr. Molyneux; I hope you will find him better."—The carriage drove off.

"How many lies one must tell in this world!" said Lady Anne to Louisa, philosophically; "it certainly cannot be helped."

Lady Anne and Louisa, attended by Lord George and Lionel, took a long walk this morning; and Lady Norbury was in all the agonies of preparation for her distinguished guests. In a house of considerable resort in the country, there is always so much trouble attendant upon the reception of a large party, so much responsibility must ever attach to the unfortunate mistress of it; and Lady Norbury piqued herself particularly upon the excellence of her arrange-

ments, they were sure to be both judiciously planned and carefully executed. She always superintended every thing herself. "One never can trust to servants, however clever they may be. Now, though Storer the housekeeper, and Tempest the butler, are both good creatures in their way, yet they are always making mistakes; and as for Crabstock, he means well, but he is so cross and tiresome, he wears me out: however, my lord finds him a good steward, very exact in his accounts, I believe. But really I do not know what I should do without the groom of the chambers, Fudge; he is a prodigious comfort." This had been her constant theme to the useful Miss Maria Molyneux; and now that that trusty aide-de-camp was gone, her ladyship had no one left as an assistant but this same ingenious Fudge. Great were his toils on this particular day; for, as he said afterwards, "I and my lady had it all to ourselves, no soul to help us either to invent or to perform." Before the party returned from

their walk, however, all was done : new pens put in all the inkstands, fresh paper in the blotting-books, more sealing-wax, more wafers supplied ; new plants were brought from the green-house, new candles put in the lustres, and every order given about the arrangement of the lights in the evening ; and when all was settled, Lady Norbury and Fudge paused to inspect and admire the pleasing effect of the whole. Then the chairs were placed in new positions, another sofa brought forward, the bergères arranged by the fire-places, the scattered volumes of all the new novels collected and laid invitingly on the reading-table, all the hand-screens put in their places, different games and puzzles laid out ;—certainly, when finished, it was very complete ; time could never hang heavy in a room so full of every sort of amusement ; it would be impossible !

All the party were at length collected together in the drawing-room, waiting with anxiety for the arrival of the long-expected visitants. It

was getting dark—too dark to read ; every one's book was put down. “ Should they have candles ? ” “ No ! it would look too formal : ” so Lady Norbury went on with her knitting by fire-light, and his lordship lighted a taper in a hand-candlestick, and put on his spectacles to pore over a *crim. con.* affair in the last column of the newspaper. Lord Mordaunt was at the window watching the rising of the moon ; Lord Dorville with his back to the fire, saying nothing, doing nothing, and, to all appearance, thinking of nothing ; the two young ladies on a distant sofa, flirting with the two other beaux, the cheerful sound of their conversation a little relieving the sombre dulness of the others. The French clock upon the chimney-piece chimed the half hour ; its tinkling sounds roused the Countess from a little reverie into which she had fallen ; “ Half-past six, I declare ! ”

“ Seven, by me,” said Lord Dorville, looking at his watch by the light of the fire.

“ Confounded late ! ” said the Earl, raising

his eyes and rousing his attention from a long speech of Mr. Brougham's, which had occupied him for some time. "What hour did you tell Monglas to have dinner ready, Lady Norbury?"

"Oh, not before eight, of course!" replied her ladyship with a yawn.

The dressing-bell rang.—"What the devil can they all be about, I wonder?" said the Earl: "I shall go and dress."

"It's a cursed long way from Derwent Vale here," observed Lord Mordaunt; "and then such deuced roads! why don't the fellows send for that Mr. Macadam? But we had better all go and dress, I think; no use in waiting any longer."

And so they did; and very soon after the party arrived, and then, of course, *they* had to dress, and it was some little time before the things were all taken out of the carriages, and before the cap-boxes, band-boxes, imperials, trunks, portmanteaus, dressing-boxes, writing-cases, and work-boxes, were carried up to the dif-

ferent apartments. The visitations of neighbouring families in the country are certainly a monstrous fuss.

At length the toilettes were completed, and the important Fudge had ushered every one into the saloon. The preliminary bows, introductions, and first greetings, were soon over: the Marquis of Glenmore then begged leave to present his nephew, Lord Hazlemere, who had been staying some time with them at Glenmore-place.

It was easy to perceive that Lady Norbury was very much delighted with the new visitor: she put on a degree of cordiality in her manner, of which Louisa could hardly have believed her capable. Lord Hazlemere was a fashionable-looking man of thirty, with a profusion of very dark hair, which curled all over his face, and a remarkable bend in his upper lip, which gave a very satirical expression to his countenance. His features were decidedly handsome; but yet their *tout ensemble* was not agreeable

in general, though he had a way of softening both his eyes and voice, and of devoting himself to some one person, which gave a stranger the idea, that, to women at least, he knew how to make himself peculiarly agreeable, though his every-day manner was remarkable for its haughty superciliousness. Lady Anne received him apparently with much pleasure, as an old and intimate acquaintance : he shook hands with Lord George Fitzallan, and inquired after his brother Killarney : when Lord Mordaunt drew near the fire-place, he fixed him with a look of particular expression, and said in an under-tone, " I thought, of course, you would be at the Priory ; I suppose you know a certain fair Viscountess expects you, particularly as Rochefort is gone to Paris."

" Yes, fool that he is," returned Lord Mordaunt ; " he cannot keep from the *salon*. But why are you not at the Priory, Hazlemere ? all your set are there."

" Yes, and all the world besides ; a sort of

omnium-gathering, a kind of thing I abominate: every body's going there would, of course, make me stay away. *L'homme universel* is not my taste."

"No, by Jove! we all know you would be *l'homme exclusif, par excellence*. Will you present me to Lady Glenmore, like a dutiful nephew?"

She was a lovely little creature, of sixteen, without any manner, yet completely at her ease—that sort of ease which sometimes arises from perfect ignorance, and sometimes from perfect knowledge of the world. It was amusing to see with what grace she conversed with that most consequential of fashionable men, the important Lord Hazlemere. Lord Glenmore seemed quite wrapped up in his fascinating wife. He was still a most striking-looking man, though now turned sixty. His manners might have served as a model for that of a perfect gentleman of the old school, uniting the greatest simplicity, with a little of the stiffness of old-

fashioned politeness; while, at the same time, there was a something so amiable in his countenance, that his first appearance impressed you instantly in his favour. It was really curious to see such a man, whose voice had made a senate tremble, the mere puppet of a child: he seemed never tired of indulging his little Rosa in every caprice: her present situation, of course, as it rendered her still dearer to him, so it served as an excuse for all kinds of whims on her part.

It seemed to be the study of his life to prevent the fair marchioness from ever regretting for a moment that she had married a man old enough to be her grandfather; and the general opinion was that he had succeeded.

The Derwent family were a happy contrast to those I have been describing. The duke had the complete appearance of an old-fashioned farmer, with a very heavy, good-humoured expression of countenance, an eye that said nothing, and a mouth that looked as if it could

do nothing but smile. At one of the meetings of the deputy-lieutenant, a country gentleman had remarked that the Duke of Derwent was evidently of the same date as old Mr. Mildmay, but the squire looked like a true nobleman, and his grace might have been taken for the squire's farmer. But there was a friendly kind-heartedness about the duke, which made him universally popular, particularly with those below him: by those of his own caste he was voted an old-fashioned quiz. The duchess was a tall, stiff, old-maidish looking woman, with a very long shrivelled neck; she wore her own silver grey hair, with a very odd fabric of a cap perched at the top of her head, which looked as if it had fallen from heaven on that particular spot, and that she was doing penance, by holding herself bolt upright to keep it there: Her brown silk gown was made to sit as close as possible to her shape, and her long, thin arms were imprisoned in a pair of very tight long sleeves.

She was formal and nervous in her manner, and her under-lip quivered before she ventured to speak to a stranger, to a degree which was almost painful. She was never at her ease in society : yet, *au fond*, she was an amiable and exemplary woman ; but, from shyness and want of intercourse with the world, she was remarkably disagreeable if not well known.

Lord Norbury took especial care to present Lionel, in a very patronizing sort of way, to all his noble friends. The duke shook hands with him in the kindest manner, and said that the late Sir Walter Montague was one of his oldest friends. Lord Glenmore, with that happy tact which distinguishes the true man of the world, had a thousand things to say which proved that he knew every thing about the family : he spoke of the Abbey as one of the finest specimens of pure gothic in the kingdom : inquired after the Baron de Wallestein, who was an old acquaintance of his : in short, made Lionel feel perfectly at home with him in a moment. The

Duke of Derwent's son, Lord Tresilian, bowed long and low. When Colonel Montague was introduced to Lord Hazlemere, his lordship hardly condescended to move any thing but his chin: he asked Lord Mordaunt if Lionel was brother to Lord Belville, whose family name was Montague; and on hearing that he was not, he instantly settled that he could be nobody worth inquiring about—some country gentleman, one of the natives probably. During dinner, however, he discovered that the stranger was brother to the new Austrian Ambassadress, a person, therefore, who might be met with sometimes in town, even in his lordship's set, and so he condescended to ask him to drink a glass of champagne. In like manner, when Louisa first came into the room, his lordship did her the honour to examine her well through his glass: he was struck with her beauty, and still more with her air and manner: he longed to know who she was; but hearing Lady Norbury tell Lady Glenmore that she was one of

their country neighbours, he felt internally hurt that he should have admired her ; and yet his love of beauty so far got the better of him, that he could not help casting a glance at her carelessly.

Louisa heeded him not ; she had Lord George next her—of course she wanted nothing else.

Lionel was seated by Lady Tresilian : her countenance was so exceedingly striking, so full of expression and intelligence, that it was quite impossible not to be taken with her.

In the evening, Lady Glenmore was much fatigued ; and, according to the fashion of the present day for ladies in her delicate situation, she lay on the sofa all her length, and, much to the dismay of the duchess, she did not even think of changing her position when the servants came in with coffee. Lady Norbury was all attention, raising and lowering the cushions according to the fancy of the little marchioness, who talked a great deal of childish nonsense

upon the occasion; at length she exclaimed, "Oh! Lady Anne; do you know I have got a promise from my lord, that I shall go to Almack's when I am in town? that is, if I am pretty well. I told him I would lie on the sofa now as long as he pleased, if he would promise me that; and so he did, and I took care to have a written agreement about it. I do so long to go there; and I am to know Lady Hauton too, and I hear she is so agreeable."

"Well, you see how kind Lord Glenmore is to you," said Lady Mary Derwent; "and I hope, in return, you will do all you can to take care of yourself: now, will you promise to be very prudent, and never to over-exert yourself?"

"Indeed I will, when I think of it."

Lord Glenmore was the first of the gentlemen who left the dining-room, and he immediately requested Lady Norbury would present him to Miss Louisa Mildmay. He regretted, most politely, that Lady Glenmore's indispo-

sition had prevented his being able to call at Bishop's-Court; but it had given him much pleasure to hear a good account of Mr. Mildmay's health and looks: he lamented that his old friend should lead so retired a life, which must be a subject of regret to all who knew his worth and abilities as well as he did. His lordship then made various inquiries after Mr. Godfrey Mildmay, and said many flattering things in his praise.

Louisa was delighted. Who has not felt how very agreeable a great man always appears to any one, to whom he pays particular attention; how many good qualities rise instantly to view, which have never been noticed before? This, however, could not be said to be the case with Lord Glenmore; for though he required to be known before half his perfections could be discovered, yet his manner had a charm in it, which never failed to prepossess every one in his favour, the first five minutes after they were in his company.

Lady Mary Derwent now joined Miss Mildmay : she understood that she played very well on the guitar, she had heard much of her singing, she hoped to hear her this evening.

“ Does Miss Mildmay play on the guitar ? ” said Lady Tresilian, who had been examining the ruins of Pola with her lord and Lionel. “ Do, Colonel Montague, ask her to favour us with a Spanish bolero.”

Louisa felt doubtful how Lady Anne might like any arrangement to take place without her sanction being asked. She therefore looked round for her, that she might inquire if she wished to have music.

Lady Anne was in a corner, apparently deep in a book, with her back turned to Lord Dorville, who was teaching a beautiful poodle to jump after a piece of sponge biscuit. Louisa whispered low.

“ My dear Lady Anne, are we to have any music to-night ? The party want a song.”

Lady Anne gave the most becoming start imaginable ; begged pardon for being taken so by surprise, “ but if you did but know the charming love-scene you have interrupted me in ! Such a declaration, from such a *héros de roman* ! Cruel girl ! to break the spell, and reduce me to the common scenes of life. To sing !—oh ! I am too much out of tune to sing to-night. Go then, lady fair, and conquer more hearts : I am quite jealous of you.”

Louisa sang, and was much applauded, until a string broke—the common fate of guitars and harps. Lionel had sung with her, not a regular accompaniment, but a sort of *ad libitum* base ; just enough to support her voice, and to give effect where it was wanted.

She then sang some German words to a little Tyrolese air, and Colonel Montague applauded her in German. Lady Tresilian, who spoke that language fluently, immediately joined in the conversation, and left Pola, and its beautiful

ruins, to listen to Louisa; who, at her desire, sang a beautiful air, to which those charming words of Goethe's are set.

“Know'st thou the land where citrons scent the gale?”

This brought German literature on the tapis; and the different merits of Goethe, Wieland, and Schiller, were discussed and criticized. Madame de Staël's *Allemagne* was quoted. Louisa listened with pleased attention; she was but a beginner in that difficult language: the Baron de Wallestein had given her some lessons when he was teaching his wife, but she had not got further than to be able to sing some German words, without quite mis-pronouncing them. Lady Tresilian was delighted to find in Colonel Montague a perfect German scholar. From the language they got to the country. Lionel had, during the war, belonged for some time to that part of the British army which had been attached to the Swedish forces during the battle of Leipsic: he described the horrors of the

scene in strong language, and related one or two affecting incidents, to which he had been an eyewitness. From Leipsic they got to the banks of the Rhine, and there, of course, Louisa became all enthusiasm. Baden and Carlsruhe were mentioned, and their names made Lord Glenmore join the circle: he had in his youth been much in that part of Germany, and he was anxious to inquire after several distinguished families, with whom he had been intimate. Spa he also talked of with much pleasure, where Louisa had spent two such happy months, the preceding summer, with the Wallesteins. The moment Spa was mentioned, Lord George jumped up from the sofa at the other end of the room, and placed himself next Louisa.

“Do you remember a certain evening at Spa,” said he, “when I had the honour of leading off in a *polonnaise* with you at the Redoute? and some Dutch fellow, oh! it was the Comte Von Hieren, came with a message from the Princess of Orange, to beg us to be her vis-

à-vis in the next quadrille, and you were engaged to the Chevalier de Steernum, who was a horrible dancer and always went *à côté du temps*, and so I persuaded you to forget the chevalier, and stand up as you were commanded by Her Royal Highness with me? And do you remember the rage the poor chevalier was in, when he came up to claim his partner, with his book in his hand, where he had entered all his dancing engagements? I thought he would have murdered me, for you were his favourite *belle*; he had come all the way from Aix-la-Chapelle to dance with you. And so, to console the poor devil, you invited him to be of the party to the Cascade de Cou, the next morning: he rode with you, and after the *pic nic*, you sang him a Scotch song, which killed him dead. And there was a certain Belgian too!!! They used to call you *l'Innocence*, because you generally wore white; and the Baroness, in her blue gown, was *la Constance*, and you know she was very constant to a thundering Russian prince."

“Hush!” said Louisa; “no tales of the absent!”

Lady Anne heard every word, though she sat at some distance and only occasionally turned her head; Lord Dorville was also sufficiently roused by what was going on, to be perfectly awake.

“I think,” said his Lordship, “Miss Mildmay seems to have a flirt in every corner.”

“Very true,” said Lady Anne, thoughtfully.

“Surely,” continued Lord Dorville, “you and I might do something together, for nobody seems to think about us; they don’t want us at the piano-forte. Shall we play at chess?”

“With all my heart!” said Lady Anne, her eye still fixed upon the party round the piano-forte. Lady Tresilian was descanting most eloquently to Lionel, he listening with profound attention. “She is certainly handsome too,” thought Lady Anne; “those large eyes of hers have so much expression. He thinks so, I am sure.” Lord George and Louisa were in a complete flirtation; he was playing with her fan,

she smiling at him through her ringlets with such pleased attention ! “ She must like Lord George,” thought Lady Anne, again “ and, if so, what is Lionel to her, and why can I make nothing of him ?”

Lord Dorville was arranging the chess-board, Lady Anne looked round at the rest of the party. The duke and Lord Norbury were deep in the politics of Europe ; Lord Mordaunt and Hazlemere at *ecarté* ; Lord Tresilian still poring over the ruins of Pola. The Duchess was teaching some new stitch to Lady Glenmore, who found infinite amusement in every mistake she made ; Lady Mary was knitting a turban, and occasionally saying a word or two to Lord Glenmore, who was walking up and down the room, now and then stopping to pick up Lady Norbury’s balls of worsted, which were constantly falling from her work-frame,—and then he would stop to look at the animated countenance of his little wife.

In society, how little can the truth be guessed

from appearances ! All the company at Norbury, this evening, supposed that Lady Anne had been trying to charm Lord Dorville, and that she had succeeded *à merveille* ; it seemed a very decided flirtation.

Lady Norbury had watched them with close attention, and was satisfied that all was going on as it should do ; regularly *en train* for a proposal in form. Lord Dorville was an excellent match, he had rank and wealth and fashion. As for sense, it did not much matter, for Lady Anne had quite enough for two. She was not at all decided but that Lord Dorville should be her choice after all : happily she had plenty of time before her ; and therefore she felt that she should like to try her powers of captivation on some others first. She admired Louisa Mildmay ; and as her favourite friend and *protégée*, she wished her to be distinguished ; but to be thrown into the back-ground by such a girl was quite unexpected. To Lord George's attentions Lady Anne had been used from a child ; and

though she did not care for them, yet she could not bear to have him neglect her. Lionel was a man of sense and spirit ; he would be sure to distinguish himself. He was just the man whose heart she would have liked to break by way of practice ; and yet she could not touch him, though he acknowledged her beauty and talent. Lord Tresilian she despised, he never took any notice of her ; Lady Tresilian she hated for her superiority. Lord Glenmore had once been the object of Lady Anne's warmest admiration ; and what had he preferred to her ? a mere child, a pretty plaything. Then there was this Lord Hazlemere. He was not half so good a match as Lord Dorville in any respect ; and if Lady Glenmore should have a son, he would be quite cut out from all that fine property, and he was so cold, so supercilious, so unpopular ;—besides, he was the humble servant of so many fine ladies. He was certainly not a marrying man ; and a small portion of such a heart would hardly be worth having. “ And then

it would be so difficult to touch him !" thought Lady Anne, as she looked at his black countenance, as he sat at cards, deeply occupied, yet occasionally turning his face round to distinguish Lady Glenmore with a smile. "*Et puis*—oh ! I am decided against him—*le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle.*"

CHAPTER V.

FASHIONABLE LIFE IN THE COUNTRY.

“I see the play so lies that I must bear a part!”

SHAKSPEARE

Who does not know the pleasure of a large party of *distingués* in a country-house; where the host and hostess have to supply amusement and conversation, from morning till night, to a set of people of whose tastes and dispositions they probably know nothing; where one part of the company are strangers to the other, and where the acquainted and unacquainted are alike indifferent to each other?—the few at the height of *ton* looking down with contempt on their servile followers; those half-way up the ladder pushing down the steps by which they mounted; and

the greater part at the bottom affecting philosophic contempt of the eminence to which one and all are alike endeavouring to attain. Who has not seen or felt all this, whether in high fashion, or middle fashion, or no fashion at all? And yet, notwithstanding the truth of this description, do not we see every day the delight with which lords and ladies, and masters and mistresses of country-houses, high-born and high-bred themselves, collect a party of people together, whom they neither like nor esteem, with infinite trouble and expense, because, *par hazard*, the invited are supreme *bon ton*, and move in what is thought a higher circle than that of the inviters?

I verily believe, that nowhere is *ennui* more intolerably felt than in a large party of fashionable loungers—assembled together in a gay country-house. What so difficult as to fill up the hours between breakfast and dinner, so as to amuse a number of persons who are indifferent to each other? When the gentlemen

have visited the farm, and the piggeries, and out-houses; and the kitchen garden, with its conservatories, mushroom establishment, hot-beds, and hotter walls; inspected the stables, and admired the hunters and coach-horses, what is there left to do, unless the post should opportunely come in just then? And what with newspapers of different sides, and letters to receive and answer, an hour or two may be got over comfortably enough.

The ladies, meanwhile, have the flower-garden, the conservatory, and green-house, to visit and discuss; waltzes and quadrilles to try over and copy; some new novel, if French so much the better, to lounge with in a great chair, or to carry up to their own apartments; then there is new work, or new patterns, to admire and learn; portfolios of lithographs and caricatures, splendid albums, and illustrations of scenery in various parts of the world. Besides these resources, if the day be fine, after luncheon some may take long rides over dirty splashing roads,

or longer drives in a shut-up carriage. And yet, notwithstanding all these efforts, time will often move with them most tediously.

Not, perhaps, if all the party be of the same humour; but in a large society there must always be cabals and caballers,—one or two persons sent to Coventry by the rest for no very good reason: the persecutors having all the fun, and the persecuted perhaps meeting with little pity.

Our party at Norbury, however, on the whole did very well, at least to all outward appearance; *le dessous des cartes* was not seen, and it was of little consequence if one or two, more penetrating than the rest, saw through the veil which general politeness cast over every thing and every body.

Lady Norbury pronounced the party quite delightful! so perfectly exclusive! Her ladyship seemed to feel the truth of what Lady Birmingham had once very vulgarly expressed, “We people of fashion ought to be all acquainted;”

and yet Lady Norbury thought the Derwents perfect humdrums. The Duke was such a cipher, his whole life seemed to be a course of civility, he was always of your opinion:—what could be so insipid? The Duchess was a *precieuse*, a *raisonneuse*, too good by half—Lady Norbury thought she must be a methodist. She was always in a state of probation, as if saying or doing disagreeable things was a virtue.

Lady Mary was better, but such a Goth in her ideas, so unlike most young women of fashion, the Countess had no patience with her. Then, above all things, her ladyship hated blues: so Lady Tresilian could find no favour with her. Lord Tresilian might be wiser, perhaps, but he was full as dull as his father, and twice as ugly.

Then Lord Glenmore was sadly changed from what he used to be; grown quite rustic, and so ridiculously taken up with such a little baby of a wife! Perhaps *she* might be called

pretty, but she was so very young, so insignificant. Then such a fuss about her situation ; if she was so delicate, why did not she stay at home till she had produced an heir ? Such were the Countess's observations in a letter she wrote to Miss Maria Molyneux.

How angry would Lady Norbury have been, had she seen another, which Lord Hazlemere wrote during his visit to Norbury, to his dear friend Lady Hauton, in which he said,—

“ Nothing can be so wretchedly dull as my *sejour* here, at your good uncle's ; a sort of ape-ing of *ton* throughout the whole business, which, as your ladyship knows, cannot be caught. The Earl talking big ; the Countess so cold, *si glaciale* in all her ways, perfectly odious, acting the *grande dame de chateau*. Then all the old tapestry of the county turned out, to make a grand party—the Derwents and Tresilians ;—you may imagine how I am *déplacé'd* among such high mightinesses, such wise heads. Lady Anne is

just now radiant in beauty, throwing herself away on that creature Dorville; she is ruining in this set; we should really try to emancipate her. She has a formidable rival here, in a pretty Miss Mildmay, an H——shire Miss, it seems; a mere nobody, but she has been much abroad, and has got that air, *qu'on ne prend qu'à Paris*. She is to be in town, with the new Austrian ambassadress: I am sure she will take: I recommend your ladyship to produce her at Almack's, she will do you credit, and you know *que je m'y connois*. There is also a certain Colonel Montague here, brother to this same ambassadress: all the world seem to adore him; and so, of course, I cut the man, and hate him. He is a sort of person I make a rule to avoid, who always appears to look above you.

“ My uncle Glenmore, the stern patriot, the man of the people, the political hero,—thinks of nothing but his little wife and his expected heir;—and what is more, I do not wonder at

him: for indeed, Lady Glenmore would turn any man's head with her beauty and innocence. I should find no difficulty in falling desperately in love with her myself: indeed, I wish for no better amusement; and when once the precious child is born, she will have plenty of time on her hands. Conceive my feelings as I walk about the woods at Glenmore, which I have so long looked upon as my own, while my infatuated uncle talks to me as if he hoped to have a dozen children. Mordaunt is here, doing nothing: what can he mean? He knows Rochefort is at Paris: I do pity that sweet woman; wretch that he is not to fly to comfort her. Tell me all about your theatricals. When do you go to town? When will Almack's want you? How goes on the feud with old Lochaber? I shall fly from Glenmore as soon as I can; but they want me to play at picquet with my little aunt, while her *dear* old lord takes his nap of an evening! No news of Killarney that I can hear; Lord George knows nothing

about him, so I did not mention what I had heard. *Je vous baise les mains, ma chère Comtesse*, and am ever,

Your devoted servant,

HAZLEMERE."

"What a very accomplished woman Lady Tresilian seems!" said Louisa one day to Lady Anne, as they were walking round the shrubbery in the afternoon.

"Yes, indeed, accomplished at the extremities; as my grandmother used to say of any girl who played or danced well."

"A charming countenance she has! so full of genius and expression. I thought last night, when she was singing 'Di tanti palpiti,' that she looked like an angel."

"Dear! did you?" said Lady Anne; "well, I know nothing of angels, if she is one. And now, pray what do you think of her dress, Louisa? what says your French taste to that?"

“ Oh ! I cannot defend her dress, certainly ; so handsome as she is, to make such a figure of herself, it is quite extraordinary ; particularly one who studies the antique so much.”

“ That is the very reason : she is always trying for effect : so to-day she dresses after a Murillo ; to-morrow, perhaps, she will be Rubens’s wife. In the morning, she is Mary Queen of Scots or the Lady of the Lake ; in the evening, Raphael’s Madonna or Titian’s mistress. That is what I call thorough bad taste : like an actress or an artist, if you please, but not a fit style for a woman of fashion.”

“ The French would suppose she was in a costume,” said Louisa ; “ they have often said to Englishwomen, ‘ *Madame est en mascarade.* ’ ”

“ And they are quite right,” said Lady Anne ; “ it is, to my fancy, the extreme of bad taste to dress differently to other people. Such affectation spoils beauty, and makes ugliness more conspicuous.”

“ Well ! I give up her dress ; but, my dear Lady Anne, if you never admire any English-woman who does not dress well—!”

“ I shall not have many to admire, I suppose you mean to say, my dear Parisian *belle* ;—but now, really, do you think Lady Tresilian so very agreeable ?”

“ Indeed I do ; she has so much eloquence and enthusiasm in her conversation, such a memory for poetry.”

“ Oh ! she makes me sick of learning and quotation. Lady Glenmore's nonsense is far more amusing, because it is so perfectly natural. After one of Lady Tresilian's grand bravuras, sung with so much science and skill, one of little Rosa's Indian airs or Irish melodies is such a treat ; your own Venetian barcarolles, and French romances, never sound to so much advantage.”

“ I do not think the Duchess and Lady Mary suit Lady Tresilian,” observed Louisa.

“ How should they ! all their ideas are cen-

tred in feeding poultry, and potting plants ; accomplishments they think waste time, and learning in a woman quite wicked ; it belongs to the men along with their breeches."

Louisa could not help laughing.

" Then the dear Duchess thought, of course, that her son would ally himself with ducal blood : he looks just like a grandee of Spain, worn out with antiquity. Lady Mary, I am sure, votes accomplishments democratic, fit only for unfortunates, who are to make their way by their talents ; quite useless for people of fashion."

" Oh ! I think you are too severe on Lady Mary,—Julia thought her so good and agreeable !"

" Very likely ! she may be to her taste, with all my heart, so that she does not force me to like her too. I should have died to see the Duchess and her bridling up their long necks, when the dear son first disclosed his love for a Cambridge doctor's daughter, a university belle, a regular

Deep blue. I dare say they expected the lightning from heaven would extinguish the whole race of Skinner. Such a horrid-sounding name, too! But ah! who goes there?—look, Louisa, through the branches of the weeping willow, two people riding.”

“Yes! Lord Glenmore and Colonel Montague; you know, they were to ride to Atherford Abbey this morning.”

“How sentimental one of your favourites would be, weeping over the portraits of his ancestors; and Lord Glenmore would listen with so much feeling, and look with such enthusiasm, and Lionel’s voice would shake with agitation; but I am sorry to tell you, my dear, that your faithful chevalier is a little bit by Lady Treilian: you know he is such a votary of the Muses, such an adorer of the arts.”

“I think he is struck, very naturally, with her talents; but she is too brilliant to please him; he loves a more unassuming, natural character.”

“More graceful and foreign in her style, I suppose you mean.”

“Oh ! your ladyship is quite wrong in the person you guess.”

“Am I ?” said Lady Anne, fixing her eyes with a look of much penetration on Louisa’s blushing countenance. “Then if it is not Colonel Montague, it must be George Fitzallan, who is in love with you, I can swear ; but I fancied somehow, that the other was your choice. And so, after all, then, my cousin George is to be the man. Oh ! you need not put down your veil, fair lady, I can see your glowing cheeks through the net : wonderfully becoming those tell-tale blushes are, certainly : pity George cannot see you now ; but I will tell him.”

“Now, is this fair, Lady Anne ?” said the indignant Louisa, as soon as her agitation would allow her the power of utterance : “you have surprised me into a confession, which I would have died rather than have made ;—besides, I

have no right—Lord George has said nothing to me.”

“Lord ! my dear, spare your modesty ! there is not a servant in the house, who does not know your secret. The other day, when I was inquiring for you, Fudge told me with a grin, that he supposed you were gone to the lodge, as Lord George went that way, as soon as he came in from his ride.”

Louisa burst into tears.

“Now, what can the foolish child be crying about ! because you are both of one mind ? for I can answer that my cousin has long loved you. Give him a little time only before he makes the grand confession : he has got the love, but he wants the cash ; and you know, in matrimony, one will not do without the other. I wanted to get you over to Norbury, just to find out the truth of the reports I had heard last winter, that he was so desperately smitten with you at Paris ; but somebody who came here the other

day, would have it, that Colonel Montague was come over to Bishop's-Court on purpose to propose to you. Certainly I might have seen enough at the ball at Merton, by all accounts, to have convinced me that Lord George and you did not very much dislike each other; might not I? What! blushing again, celestial, rosy red, love's proper hue, fair lady? Only to think, now, that I should have been *all* this time so mistaken about Colonel Montague's attentions to you!"

"But surely," said Louisa, wiping her eyes, and endeavouring to recover from her agitation, "your ladyship has not cared very much about Colonel Montague, otherwise Lord Dorville's very particular manner would——."

"Would do what!" interrupted Lady Anne, impatiently: "I can tell Lord Dorville he is not to suppose me to be at his bidding whenever he pleases; his persuasive looks, and more persuasive sighs, had better be offered to those who, perhaps, may value them more. But see

the old proverb exemplified, there he is,—‘ Talk of the Devil :’ what is that in French, my dear Louisa ?”

“ *Parlez-moi de l’ane, et l’on en voit les oreilles.*”

“ Very good ; for Dorville is, certainly, much more like *un ane*, than a devil ; but at this moment I see not his ears, but his hat. Mercy on us ! what deep conversation he is in with Mor-daunt ! there they go by the great elm into the plantation ; what can they be talking about, I wonder !”

“ Lord Dorville may very probably be confessing his partiality for your ladyship, after what passed last night. I thought——”

“ Oh, you thought we flirted so desperately. But my ladyship is not at all decided to be Lady Dorville ; it would be a bitter pill to marry a man you so thoroughly despise. Now, Lord Glenmore would have suited me ; I could have vowed honestly to love, honour, and obey him ; I should have felt proud of myself in

being the wife of such a distinguished man, and I think I should not have been unworthy of him. Let me see ;—he is sixty, I am near twenty-three. I am tired of the world and all its ways : I could have enjoyed the dignified retirement of Glenmore Place ; I should have made him a most admirable nurse. I look older than I am, and no one would take him to be above fifty ; there would have been nothing ridiculous in our union. But Rosa Danvers, only fifteen ! oh, it was quite absurd ! she had never dined out of her governess's room till the day the settlements were signed ; and how little she will know about educating a family ! yet I could envy her."

" What say you to Lord Hazlemere ?"

" Nothing : he is a creature who would die of delicacy ; so fine, so frivolous, so absurd ! all men hate him and his platonics. You know, he is the humble servant of a certain set of fine ladies, who make love to him,

and save him a vast deal of trouble. We found he has a decided taste for beauty. Some men are bird fanciers, and others are beast fanciers, and he is a girl fancier: he would run after your pretty maid Eloise, if he met her in a retired part of the park; or he would be at your feet here, if you were Lady Louisa Mildmay; and when you had gone through a course of Hazlemere, and were deeply smitten with him, then he would turn on his heel, wish you good morning, and flutter round some newer fair one. *C'est un papillon volage.*"

"Odious man!" said Louisa, with indignation; "how you make me hate him! And pray, Lady Anne, what sort of person is the famous Lord Killarney, Lord George's brother?"

"Oh, I must say nothing against him, for you know, or perhaps you do not know, that he is the man, mamma, in her secret heart, would like me to marry: from my very cradle I have been set out for him. He is very hand-

some, very agreeable, very good-for-nothing very extravagant—the greatest *roué* in Europe, perhaps. No one can withstand him, man or woman. If you believe me, he has neither principles nor honour; he is the soul of whim and pleasure; every thing by starts, and nothing long. Conceive what a prospect before me, to expect to be the wife of such a man! cold water thrown on every proposal that has hitherto been made to me, that I may remain single till his return, that he may throw his handkerchief at his poor cousin's feet, if he pleases:—this is the fate reserved for Anne Norbury; and my haughty mother will not care if I should break my heart, so that I hold my head high as Marchioness of Allandale. Ah! Louisa, I could envy you your brighter prospects, for George would make any woman happy. Killarney has been years abroad, but he is soon expected home. Report says he has some woman of fashion travelling with him as his mistress, to whom he is entirely devoted.

He went abroad after a *crim. con.* affair; he was unable to pay the damages, and he refused to marry the victim of his perfidy. But, hark! I hear these men again; let us avoid them. How late we have stayed out by the light of the moon! there is the dressing-bell;" and her ladyship turned into the vestibule, repeating, in a careless manner,

‘ Je vais donner une heure au soin de mon empire,
Et le reste du jour sera tout à Zaïre.’

“ I read that beautiful play this morning; what is the parody I have heard you repeat on those lines, Louisa?”

“ Je vais donner une heure au soin de ma toilette,
Et le reste du jour sera tout à Finette.”

“ That is more to the purpose, a woman's empire is the toilette. *Soignez bien vos charmes, ma belle.* Adieu!”

CHAPTER VI.

THE POST.

“Speed the soft intercourse from soul to soul.”

POPE.

THE arrival of the post was always the moment of the greatest interest at Norbury. Lady Norbury and her daughter had each of them a numerous list of correspondents; and every birth, death, and marriage, within a certain set, was sure to be communicated to them. Lord Norbury was too much of a politician not to be deeply interested in what was going on. Not only every event, but every report, every *bon mot* on his side of the question, was of importance to him; no man in England cared more for the *on-dit* of the day, than his lordship.

One morning, during breakfast, Lady Norbury observed in her usual soft, sleepy tone, as she sat balancing her tea-spoon on the edge of her cup, "How very late the post is, this morning : Lord Norbury, you must really desire Crabstock to scold the boy ; he grows so very lazy, and comes later every day."

" I suspect he is already come," said his lordship ; " but the ladies and gentlemen down stairs are prodigious quidnuncs. I am sure, both Tempest and Fudge read the papers through before they bring them up."

" Very likely ; I wonder, therefore, why you do not have the bag in, and open it yourself, as most people do. But you do make such a fuss about the newspapers being ironed : I am sure men are twice as particular as women, when they take a whim into their heads."

" I never said they were not," returned Lord Norbury, coldly. There was an unfortunate peevishness in the Countess's tone, which

always grated disagreeably on his lordship's ear: no matter what was the subject, her key was always a plaintive one;—he generally listened to it as little as possible, and seldom made any answer to her grievances.

Lord Glenmore observed, that there was no time so pleasant for the post to come in as immediately after breakfast, particularly where the postman waited for the answers, as he did at Norbury.

“It is amusing,” said the Duke of Derwent, “to observe the difference of people's tastes: my letters are left at the Lodge, at Derwent Vale, at eight in the evening, the answers are called for at twelve the next day; which I think the best arrangement, because one has time then to reflect before one answers a letter.”

“Dear! how can your grace like that?” said Lady Anne. “I should hate to receive my letters in the evening, so many sleepless nights would be the consequence: even pleasure, in the shape of news, will banish Morpheus.”

“ I fancy, when your ladyship is a little older,” said the Duke, smiling, “ you will find your nerves not quite so easily excited : none but very young ladies ever receive such exquisitely interesting letters.”

“ That, though the heart would break with more,
It cannot live with less ;”

said Lord George, looking slyly at Louisa. “ I have often wondered what the deuce women can find to write about : such crossed sheets ! one ought to be paid for deciphering their chequer-work. Well, I do hate writing letters, that I will honestly own.”

“ I think I could guess at your stile, Lord George,” said Lady Anne, “ from one or two of your epistles, which Mordaunt has shown me ; for you seldom or ever write to mamma or me.”

“ No ; and for a good reason too : you would not care for them or the writer : and that's the main thing after all, isn't it ?” turning to Louisa ;

“ a line from any one one cares about, one must be interested with.”

“ The writer, or the line ?” said Lady Anne ; “ for you are not very clear in your English this morning. Perhaps Miss Louisa Mildmay can explain why you have quarrelled with the personal pronoun *I*. A one, an *on-dit*, I suppose, means nothing.”

“ But how does he write ?” said Lady Glenmore in her childish manner ; “ I am dying to know.”

“ Oh, first of all, he puts his date,—Cork, or Dublin, or Glasgow, we will suppose,—in large letters at the top ; then, underneath, perhaps, ‘ Doghole of a room, ten feet square, full of smoke.’ Half way down the page, very small in one corner,—‘ My dear uncle ;’—then considerably lower still,—‘ Wretched quarters these ! no fun at all going on—our grey-haired Colonel as great a martinet as ever, hang the old quiz !—No hopes of promotion. We are all confounded stupid ; can’t even raise a ball, till the assizes ;

when all the pretty girls will flirt, of course, with the black-coated lawyers. Well, good night: excuse greasy paper, soft pen, and thick ink. My duty to my aunt, love to the rest.

‘ Your affectionate nephew,

‘ GEORGE FITZALLAN.

‘ Very low in cash just now; the governor monstrous tardy with his remittances.’

“ Thus, having written his name very large, he contrives to fill up the whole of the second page.”

“ Ha, ha, ha!” said Lord George, “ ’faith, Lady Anne, you’re a much greater wit than I took you for; though you’ve put all the pith of my letter in the postscript, and that, you know, is the sign of a lady’s epistle. But now that you have succeeded so well in my style, I hope you will give us another specimen or two. Miss Louisa Mildmay, for instance, how does she write?”

“ Oh, she has *l’esprit de Sevigné*, and the sense of Lady Mary Wortley. How could I pretend to ridicule what I cannot imitate!”

“Cruel Lady Anne, to be so satirical!” said Louisa.

“Satirical, my dear! I like that, as if you did not know that you possess *l'eloquence du billet* like a Frenchwoman: no sham modesty, if you please. But do any of you know Mrs. Sydenham's style of letter-writing?”

“Oh, pray let us have it!” said several voices.

“In the first place, she writes a very running hand; you can't possibly distinguish her *m*'s from her *n*'s and her *w*'s—I would almost defy you: yet altogether it is very flowing and elegant-looking, only one word will sometimes nearly fill up a whole line:—‘So inexpressibly obliged for Lady Norbury's gratifying attention, which has been most gratefully received; such a pleasing mark of decided friendship, displayed with such good sense and judgment, that it found its way at once to a heart overflowingly alive to kindness.’ Now, is not that

all *verbiage*, full of adjectives, epithets, and superlatives; the true sentimental style?"

"And the proper one for a handsome woman," said Lord Mordaunt, looking up from the racing calendar; "graceful and elegant like herself. I wish you would mind whom you attack, Anne, when you are in one of your quizzing humours."

"Excellent, 'faith!" said Lord Hazlemere, elevating his bushy eyebrows a full half inch, and running his fingers through his well-curled locks: "I am obliged to you, Mordaunt." But his lordship took no notice, though several of the company looked surprised.

Lady Anne, heedless of every thing but her present whim, continued; "Now, my friend Maria Molyneux sports the *brusque* and laconic, hopping from one thing to another in an extraordinary manner. Supposing she begins:—
'Was glad to hear your cold was better, and hope you will take care of yourself. Colds

have been very general this winter. Mr. Smith has got a bad cold, and his wife has had the influenza, and their little girl has been suffering from the croup; a most dreadful complaint, which has been very general lately at Bath among children. I hear Bath is just now very gay, but the company not quite so select as at Brighton. The King is the great life of that place: some fancy the Pavilion will not be gay this winter; which would be a vast pity, I think. Mr. Petty is to marry the little Miss Coates, so the wits say she will never want for petti-coats.' Now this is Maria's style of eloquence.

"Dora's is the true hum-drum; too dull almost to quiz. 'I hope your ladyship will excuse my not having written sooner, (as indeed I wished to have done,) but papa has been ill, which makes him very uncomfortable, besides being a little crossish, as many people are apt to be when they are rather ill; no one more so than myself: so, you know, one ought

always to make allowances for others, particularly for elderly people. I hope this will be a sufficient excuse to you for my not having taken up my pen before ; but indeed I have a better one still to give, which I am sure you will be quite satisfied with, for I have cut my finger and thumb so very badly, (indeed I may almost say dangerously,) that till to-day I really could not hold a pen.'—Now, good people, I think I have given you quite enough for the present."

" Oh, do go on, dear Lady Anne," said Lord Dorville, clapping his hands ; " it is quite delightful to hear you : give us one of Miss Bevil's letters."

" Oh, an attempt at *esprit, le style caustique par excellence*. Let us see : Oh ! I have her now :—' London dull this winter : balls without suppers, men without money, girls without lovers. People of *ton*, and high *ton* too, give dinners of fourteen, and only two dishes of a side ; so it must be elegant to have no ap-

petites. Then they stick themselves up on the fourth tier at the opera, and vote it charming; all humbug—imposes on no one. Sir Jemmy Jessamy *aux pieds de* Mademoiselle Flutter, Lord Foppington *aux écoutes*, in case the baronet should be *congédié*d, in order to pop into his shoes. Mrs. Pickle's affair with Mr. Pepper quite off. The Puddledocks are done up *in toto*; going abroad: they prefer starving in France to begging in England: wish 'em joy with all my heart.' ”

“ Ha, ha, ha !” said Lord Dorville ; “ and who the deuce are the Puddledocks ?”

“ Oh, that I leave you to find out !” said Lady Anne, as she threw herself back on her chair, and yawned aloud, “ How tired I am, to be sure !”

“ No wonder,” said Lord George, “ after such exertions : why, you have given us the Polite Letter-writer with great effect.”

It was not, however, her exertions that had tired Lady Anne, but she was mortified to find

all her wit thrown away on Colonel Montague : he had never once approached her circle ; he and Lord and Lady Tresilian had had much agreeable conversation upon a variety of subjects. The Duke, Lord Norbury, and Lord Glenmore were disputing a point of law. The Duchess was explaining to the yawning Lady Norbury how to cure chickens of the gape. Lady Glenmore was not well, she was exhibiting *en belle malade*, at full length, on the sofa at the end of the room ; the kind-hearted Lady Mary was sitting beside her, and trying all she could to make her comfortable. Lord Hazlemere, sitting in a corner, pretending to read a novel of Pigault le Brun's, but sometimes watching Lady Glenmore, sometimes listening to every body.

At length the post arrived ; the long-expected letters were brought in, and placed before Lord Norbury, who proceeded, with much importance, to distribute them according to their directions : he first distributed the newspapers.

“ My Lord Duke, here is the Courier and the Morning Chronicle; but of course your Grace will choose the former: will you pass the other to Lord Glenmore. Ladies, the Morning Post and the Herald.”

“ Oh, pray let me have the Morning Post! I want to see what they say about the Opera, and when Almack's is to commence.”

“ May I ask if that is John Bull?” said the Duke.

“ Oh, that odious paper!” said Lady Glenmore; “ how can you read it? why it attacks all the ladies' reputations and bonnets, and the last is not to be borne.”

“ Any letters for me, papa?” said Lady Anne.

“ Patience, fair lady, I have not opened half yet. Oh, yes, here is one; and three for your mother. Miss Louisa Mildmay, a packet from Bishop's-Court, I have the pleasure to present to you. The Lord Mordaunt, M. P.,

there: and one for Lord George Fitzallan; War-office, I perceive: Lord Hazlemere, frank-ed by Lord Hauton; news from the Priory, of course. And now, I believe, my labours are ended; really we members, of either house, have trouble sufficient. Oh! I see the Duchess has got her own letters, as well as Lady Mary, so I need not offer the new Quarterly Review."

"My father desired to have his letters sent over from Derwent Vale to Merton, in time for your lordship's post," said Lady Mary.

Who has not seen a happy party dispersed round a library, all devouring news, public and private? the gentlemen immersed in politics; the ladies deep in "births, deaths, and marriages." Who has not experienced the happiness of receiving a folio sheet of fashionable gossip, from the best possible authority? Then the difficulty, sometimes, of deciphering a word in the most important part of a sentence, the name,

perhaps, of a lover ; the nicety it requires to show the word without revealing the mystery, or letting the whole line be seen !

Louisa Mildmay flew into her own room, with two long epistles, one from Julia, and another from Madame la Baronne de Waldestein.

The latter began by regretting Paris, as usual ; indeed, with her it was always the beginning and end of every thing. She described Brighton, its pleasures and inhabitants, with considerable vivacity, and then proceeded thus :

“ *Après tout, ma chère amie*, I exist better here than in the *brouillards* of smoky London. Besides, I have had much *succès*, and am quite the fashion. The other night at the Pavilion, where, by the by, I am commanded frequently, I heard two men disputing about—I may as well *trancher le mot*—my good looks ; one, of course, approved me more than the other, and observed at last,—‘ Well ! you must allow, at

least, that she dresses well, and she is the only woman here who does.'—You will say, after all, this is no compliment. In Paris, to be cited for one's toilette, *c'est quelque chose*; but here among these English dowdies, *on l'entend à peu*. But yet I felt gratified by the man's taste. I rewarded him by dropping my fan close to his chair; of course, he rose to pick it up, and, when he presented it, in his best English manner, I gave him a smile, and an *acillade* that killed him dead at once. Most of the good people here take me for a foreigner; and therefore they are so charmed, so surprised by my very good English, and my knowledge of their customs and manners; and then I take their compliments with a modesty that is quite touching.

“Most of the corps diplomatique have been here *pour faire leur cour*. Rien de marquant among *les Ambassadrices*. I mean to eclipse them all; I am much the youngest, and *sans flatterie* the only well-looking one. I shall

produce an effect, you may depend upon it: my singing takes vastly with a certain set, and all my romances are quite new here, where they are always so behindhand with every thing that comes from Paris. In England *il faut être tout ou rien*, as Alphonse de Rosenval said to me. You remember the little Comte de Rosenval: well, now he is Wallestein's private secretary, *un très joli garçon, d'une tournure parfaite, c'est moi qui l'ai formé*. The secretary of legation is le Prince Alfred de Steinberg; and the English are such ignoramuses about foreign titles, that, because he is a prince, they fancy he must be a person of vast importance: they always place him in the newspaper before Wallestein, immediately after the Royal Family. It makes poor little Rosenval so very angry, as he is decidedly of a much better family than Steinberg. The other day he observed to me, '*Madame, pour plaire en Angleterre il faut être Prince, les fashionables n'admirent que cela.*'

“ There is that foolish Lady Bellamont here, with that tribe of tall, fair-haired, lisping-daughters, the Lady Hares ; well, she made up vastly to Rosenval, and always called him *mon Prince*, till he undeceived her, and told her that he was the Comte de Rosenval ; and then you should have seen how she cut him. So he went up to her the other day, and said, ‘ *Madame, aurais-je eu le malheur de vous déplaire, parceque je ne suis pas Prince ? Je vous assure que je ne changerais pas mon nom pour celui d’aucun prince. Madame, à Petersbourg j’ai été rasé par un prince ; à Naples, il y a des princes qui vous demanderont l’aumône dans les rues.*’ So the silly woman, in return, has quarrelled with me too, because he has opened her eyes to the dignity of a prince on the Continent. Why, God help her ignorance ! half these princes are not as good as a common English squire ; yet she would think herself happy to give one of her maypole daughters to any foreigner with the title of prince. Tell me the country where humbug

goes so far as it does in this famed Albion. I inclose you a sweet little billet I had the other day from our favourite the Countess Ernest Tilly de Podenasse; I am sure you will be pleased with it. Bless me! how late it is, and I have got to dress for the Pavilion. I am told that even his M——y admires the taste with which I decorate my pretty person. I always thought him an accomplished man, though he was born in this country. We return to Portland Place next week, and then I shall be miserable till you arrive, *ma très chère*.

“How did Lionel bear the sight of Atherford Abbey? I do not think I could bring myself to go there. I hear much of the vulgarity of those odious Birminghams. Lady Hauton is the person I am dying to know: I am told she is the leader of fashion, and the Queen of Almack's. There is some magic in that frightful name, for it seems to excite more effect than love, politics, or any thing else. We are certainly a strange nation, not a whit wiser than

our neighbours, only more solemnly absurd. What a comfort it is having Lionel an M. P. ! the only good thing that Parliament does, sending one's letters free. The children enjoy the sea-air vastly, and are much improved in looks ; how thankful I am at having only two ! The large families of this country sicken me quite ; such perfect folly ! no wonder people are always complaining of poverty. Adieu, my dearest love. Wallestein inquires often after you.

“ Your most affectionate friend,

CAROLINE,

BARONNE DE WALLESTEIN.”

The French note inclosed, contained the following lines :

“ Nous avons tous appris, Madame la Baronne, avec un plaisir inexprimable, l'heureuse nouvelle de votre débarquement dans votre Isle. Que de vœux nous avons adressés au ciel pour que vous pussiez faire le voyage sans danger ;— et cette malheureuse mer qui nous sépare de notre charmante amie, comme nous la détestons ! !

“ Et vous avez toujours la bonté de penser un peu à nous. Que notre belle France doit vous aimer, puisque vous la regrettez tant ! Vous me questionnez au sujet de nos modes. Vous saurez sans doute, le changement extraordinaire que nous avons fait depuis peu. Après nous être moqués de vos longues tailles, nous les avons adoptées, et même exagérées. Je vous avoue que je les trouve affreuses ; mais dans ce pays-ci, il faut suivre la mode en tout. Je suppose que chez vous la liberté qu'accorde votre fameux Parlement s'étend jusqu'à l'habillement des femmes. Ici nos belles du jour se couvrent les bras de bracelets, ce qui, selon moi, défigure un beau bras, et attire trop l'observation sur celui qui ne l'est pas. Adieu ! Madame, rappelez-moi s'il vous plait au souvenir de votre intéressante amie Mademoiselle Louise de Mil-demer. Je n'oublierai jamais la musique délicieuse, dont nous jouissions chez vous. Comme me disait l'autre jour le Comte de Pronville, ‘ Le plaisir suivait tous les pas de Madame la

Baronne de Wallestein.' Les jolies soirées de la Rue Royale ont fait une impression sur le cœur de tous ceux qui ont eu l'honneur d'y assister, que le temps même ne saura jamais effacer—' advienne ce qui pourra.'

"Recevez, Madame, les vœux sincères d'une amie qui vous est entièrement dévouée, pour que vous jouissiez de tout le bonheur que vous méritez, et permettez que j'ose vous prier d'agréer l'expression des sentimens d'attachement que vous avez su si bien inspirer à

"La Comtesse ERNEST TILLY DE PODENASSE."

"Delicious flattery!" said Louisa; as she replaced the note within the Baroness's letter, which, with Julia's, she locked up in her writing-case, and then went down stairs. She found the ladies all still in the drawing-room. Lady Norbury was full of a letter she had received from Lady Birmingham.

"The idea of such a person expecting me to apply about a subscription to Almack's for her!

It is really too good," said her ladyship, with uncommon *hauteur*. "I, who would not even solicit for a single ticket for Anne; till at last my niece, Lady Hauton, had the grace to offer us two subscriptions. But really I am not so intimate with this Lady Birmingham that she should suppose I would put myself under an obligation for her. I can tell her that she will find, though I am obliged to tolerate her in the country, I mean to have nothing to do with her in London. Do, Anne, read me what she says."

"Where am I to begin, mamma? with the description of the lustres, or pier glasses, or the new carriage, finished off in Leader's best style?"

"Oh, spare me the carriage, as I hope never to get into it! and the lustres and pier glasses, I suppose, are much like other people's. Read what she says of her house."

"Our mansion is at last completed, and I long to show it to your ladyship. We are to entertain a select party of twenty distinguished friends in it, for the first time, on Sunday next.

Our dining-room is forty feet by twenty, and the Duke of N—— declares that the proportions are perfect. The drawing-rooms, his Grace pronounced, did Gillow infinite credit. Pray tell Lady Anne the grand ball-room floor has a spring in it, which I expect her ladyship will find very agreeable for dancing. The marble saloon opens into a conservatory, which I mean to have filled with the finest exotics, from my green-house at the Abbey; a waggon of a new construction is now building to convey them, and we are also to have immense quantities of peaches and nectarines up at the same time. I intend to begin the season with a splendid *fête*, the instant Collinet and his band arrive. I am just now quite vexed to hear that my old friend Lady Lochaber is no longer one of the Lady Patronesses for Almack's; I had depended on her for a subscription after Easter: unfortunately, I do not visit any one of the other Lady Patronesses, but, as I know that Lady Hauton is your ladyship's niece, would you, my dear Lady Norbury, make interest with her

for the first set ? I shall of course send her an invitation to my ball, as soon as the cards are out."

" Then follows a long history about Barbara's masters."

" Oh, spare me that, for Heaven's sake !" said Lady Norbury, peevishly. " You will have to write my absolute negative, Anne."

" But surely you will ask for a subscription for her," said Lady Glenmore, raising herself from the sofa ; " as she is your near neighbour, and as Lady Hauton is your niece ?"

" Oh, my dear Lady Glenmore ! you are so young and unknowing in the world yet ; you cannot form an idea what a horrid thing it would be in London, among a certain set, to patronize such people as the Birminghams. Besides, I make a rule never to ask any favour of Lady Hauton ; it would be taking so mean an advantage of our relationship."

" Dear, how odd a speech that sounds for an aunt to make ! I mean to apply to my cousin, Lady Plinlimmon, for all my Welsh relations,

I assure you : because, as every body pays for their tickets, I cannot see why it is any great favour to be admitted."

" Oh ! but you know," said Lady Anne, " that will not suit the ladies patronesses at all ; they have worked so hard to keep it among people one knows, of one's own society. And the Birminghams may be very rich, and all that sort of thing, but they never can be one of us."

" Pray," whispered Lady Mary Derwent to Lady Anne, " are not the Birminghams particular friends of Miss Mildmay's ? Her sister, I believe, is staying with them in town ; so we had better say nothing more about them, it might distress her."

" Oh dear !" said Lady Anne ; " she is too well used to hear them laughed at, to mind it."

" Lady Birmingham's vanity makes her very absurd," said Lady Mary ; " but it is a harmless foible, which hurts nobody. The daughter is a very pleasing young woman, and I believe particularly amiable."

“ Is she ? ” said Lady Norbury, with affected *nonchalance*.

“ I thought she had been staying here lately ? ” observed the Duchess of Derwent.

“ Oh ! yes ; we had her with a party of the natives ; but there were so many other Misses, I hardly observed her.”

“ That was a pity,” replied the Duchess ; “ for she is far from being a common-place person ; the lady who brought her up, Mrs. Selwyn, who is half sister to Lady Birmingham, is Mary’s particular friend. During Miss Birmingham’s residence at the rectory at Derwent, we saw much of her ; and though she was then very young, I feel convinced she must have turned out a charming character : Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn are very superior people.”

Lady Norbury was surprised, for it was seldom the Duchess of Derwent exerted herself to say so much.

“ Pray, Colonel Montague,” said Lady Glenmore ; “ what was it I heard Lord George Fitz-

allan telling you about his brother to-day, in the hall."

"Oh! he had heard accidentally that Lord Killarney was living very privately at Paris; that he had a most beautiful woman with him, who had accompanied him from Naples, and to whom some people suppose he is privately married; and that this lady has a little girl with her, of whom he also appears passionately fond."

"Dear! how curious!" said Lady Glenmore, "quite like a novel! do you suppose it is his child? How I shall long to hear all about it! I must tell Hazlemere, because he has often described Lord Killarney to me as the most fascinating man that ever lived! I should so like to know him."

"And why should you want to be acquainted with a very wretched, bad man, Lady Glenmore? a most dangerous companion, you must be aware," said the Duchess, with much gravity.

"Oh, but my dear madam! now that I am

married, there would be no danger for me; I like my dear Lord Glenmore too well to fall in love with any other person."

Lady Mary could not help smiling.

"Lord Killarney is a miserable instance of perverted talents," said the Duchess; "he has occasioned more private misery than any person I am acquainted with. And is such a person to be sought after, because he is handsome and accomplished? No! I would have him refused admittance every where. I shall tell Lord Glenmore, I hope he will not allow him an intimacy with your ladyship."

"Oh! now, pray don't; because that will be just the way to make me determine to get acquainted with him," said the little Marchioness.

"Oh! fie, naughty child!" said Lady Mary.

"How absurd she is!" thought Lady Tresilian, as she looked up from a large quarto on which she had been engrossed; "what can be the charm of folly, I wonder?"

CHAPTER VII.

RESOURCES ON A WET DAY.

“ Eh, l'ennui ! l'ennui ! c'est une terrible chose que l'ennui ! Peut-être que plus on a de l'esprit, moins on a de ressources pour se désennuyer ; vivent les sots pour s'amuser de tout ! ”

How sad is a wet day in the country, particularly where there is a large party, whose only business is to kill the time. Billiards, chess, backgammon, battledore and shuttlecock, all in their turn were tried, and tried in vain ; the being obliged to have recourse to them takes off all their charm. Happy the man who, in such case, has letters to write ; happier he who can read an hour without a yawn ; but hap-

piest of all that useful mortal, who can amuse himself by unravelling skeins of twisted silk for industrious fair ones, and then be occupied himself in netting cabbage-nets: he hears unmoved the tempest roar, secure from ennui, and saved those fits of spleen to which most of the male sex are exposed in bad weather.

En passant, however, I must make one remark upon the party assembled at Norbury. It was curious to see how one complete wet day drew together those of similar tastes and opinions for an hour or two, whom the blind God, or various causes, separated through life. For instance, Lady Mary Derwent, who, under a very forbidding exterior, concealed a mind of great feeling, had long cherished a secret preference for Lord Glenmore. She had looked up to him from infancy with the utmost respect and admiration; he was the idol of her imagination; and she now felt the utmost interest for

his little bride, who, being the daughter of Lady Danvers, Lord Glenmore's first love, was evidently doubly dear to him. Had Lady Mary possessed less reserve and timidity, the marquis might perhaps have distinguished her; but though he had known her all her life, till now he had never discerned her merit. When, all at once, during this long wet morning, he discovered how very agreeable her conversation was, then her tone of voice was so particularly sweet, and her language so well chosen. Their opinions, too, on so many subjects exactly coincided. She was so mild and indulgent in her judgments on others. Certainly the marquis now thought Lady Mary a very charming woman: plain she could hardly be called with so pleasing a countenance. How came he never to have found it out before?

“Like so many of his sex—blind 'till too late.”

Then, who were the two in such animated con-

versation at the piano-forte? Lady Tresilian and Lionel. With all his modesty she had found him out: he could appreciate her powers, both natural and acquired, and he was the only one of the present party who could. She acted Corinne for him to perfection; and Lionel was quite enchanted with the extent and variety of her talents, and with her passionate enthusiasm for poetry and music. He would never have wished for such a wife; he would almost have agreed with Mr. Edgermond in that delightful novel, *Corinne, Que fait-on de cela à la maison?*—but as a mistress, an actress, an artist, she was quite divine, an inspired Muse—how little suited to the heartless insipidity of Norbury! Lady Anne called her the *Áspasia*, and was very witty on the subject. Her ladyship had chased away those azure demons, the usual offspring of damp and dulness, by a battle of wit against Lord Hazlemere. They were accordant spirits, cold, satirical, and fa-

shionable, blind worshippers of *ton*, and careless of every thing but distinction.

His lordship piqued himself on reading Shakspeare better than any one; and so, leaving the Marchioness to take a nap, he lounged at full length on another sofa, and began spouting from the play of *Romeo and Juliet*. Lady Anne most obligingly volunteered immediately to be his Juliet if he would act the lover, and a very tender scene ensued. It might have had its effect on Lady Anne, but she remembered Mrs. Metcalf's timely caution; and she determined that his artful flattery, and well-practised sighs and hints, should have no charms for her.

She enacted Juliet all the better for it; had she really felt only half that she pretended to do, she could not have done it near so well. At length the sounds caught Lord Dorville's ear, and a jealous twinge ran through his heart. He had been playing at cup and ball for a wager

with Lady Glenmore, who had been awakened by the acting; and as she lay extended on a *chaise longue*, begged Lord Dorville to play at fox and goose with her: and then she made the saloon echo again with her triumphant laugh, whenever she was successful; yet, in the intervals, she observed several times to her companion—

“What a bore it is! In my situation, Lord Glenmore says it is not safe for me to play at battledore and shuttlecock, and it is my favourite game! I have kept up a thousand!”

“Deuced hard, indeed! Cursed bore the situation must be to you women. Pity you all, upon my soul!”

The ranting, the talking, the music, all had stopped at the same moment; a frightful silence had come on so very suddenly, that Lord Dorville was not aware he had spoken so loud, and that his words were heard distinctly by Lord Hazlemere, who exclaimed:—

“What! pity the whole sex in the lump,

may now, that is too good ! Why, ' 'Tis their vocation, Hal ! ' ' "

Lord Dorville heard him, but understood him not. He felt hurt, however, by Lady Anne's long and saucy laugh which followed ; and he thought it necessary to ask what was the matter.

" Are you still acting, or is it real ? "

" Why, my good fellow, in this world we are all acting, you know ; but Lady Anne has been going through some scenes of Romeo and Juliet with me. Will you join us ? "

Lord Dorville looked somewhat doubtful.

" Will you be County Paris ? " asked Lady Anne, with a most gracious smile. " Do, pray, my lord ! be the County Paris. "

" And who is he ? " was the anxious inquiry.

" Oh ! he is lover to Lady Anne—I mean to Juliet, of course. "

" I can have no objection to be any thing to you, " said Lord Dorville, looking at her ladyship with much complacency.

" Ha, ha, ha ! " said Lord Mordaunt, putting

down the Racing Calendar. "Faith, Dorville! I pity you; between those two you'll be caught, I see. They'll make *a do* of you, man, that's clear!"

An exclamation was now heard from another corner of the room, with a sort of suppressed laugh. It was addressed to Lord George by Miss Louisa Mildmay, who sat at a little table apart, near the window, copying a Greek air from Lady Tresilian's music-book; while his lordship, who had been for some time yawning over a novel, as he lay back in the very largest of large arm-chairs, suddenly threw down "The Sorrows of Sympathy," to amuse himself in darting paper arrows at the fair Louisa's head. Several of them lodged in her *belle chevelure*; but she took no notice, till her attention was roused by seeing one or two of them perched at the top of the sort of pyramidal cap, which formed the head-dress of the Duchess of Derwent, who sat very composedly with her back turned towards her tormentor, and quite uncon-

scious of what was going on. Louisa trembled lest Lady Mary should turn her head towards her mother, but happily she was too much occupied: Lord Glenmore was too agreeable. Lord George was so much overset with the cap and the darts, that he could do nothing but laugh. Louisa got up on tip-toe, very gently mounted the sofa behind the Duchess, and displaced the arrows without touching the citadel. She hoped all this had been done unobserved, but Lord Mordaunt gave a loud *bravo*, and clapped his hands.

“ Well done, indeed ! an admirable messenger for Cupid. But what a blind god to attack such an impregnable fortification ; why not turn his arrows nearer home ? So fair an aide-de-camp would be easily hit.”

“ Oh ! he has been shooting at me the last half-hour,” said Louisa, unguardedly.

“ Oh, he has, has he ? and shot you dead too, *I* think.”

The tone with which these words were pro-

nounced gave them a very pointed meaning, and Louisa felt confused : she dared not look up, but fixed her eyes upon the music-book ; in a minute her little taper* hand was seized and

* A little taper hand is certainly a vastly pretty thing, and therefore I describe one of my fair heroines as possessing this truly feminine attraction ; but I do not mean to give a description of it in every tenth page according to the manner of the author of "*Tremaine*."

It is somewhat singular, that though I have been all my life acquainted with that gentleman, I never before knew of his passion for fingers. But it is all right : eyes of every hue, forms of all dimensions, complexions fair and brown, hair from elfin black to snowy white, have all been celebrated by the poet, and the novelist. A well-turned ankle is a *sine qua non* with all men of blood and high breeding. But the little plump, taper, snowy hand was reserved to touch the proud, philosophic heart of the metaphysical Tremaine.

A friend has just informed me, that the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa proved himself to be of the same taste in his celebrated song—

“ Plaz mi cavalier Frances,
E la donna Catalana,
El l'onrat del Genoes,
E la court de Castellana
Lou cantar Provenzallez,
E la danza Trevisana

pressed. She expected this would have been the crisis of her fate. She hardly dared to breathe, her heart beat violently, though she scarcely knew she had one for a moment or two; but nothing was said, the hand was relinquished, yet the pressure had been so close, that one of her rings had actually chafed the skin.

“What did he mean?”

“Were they not talking about shooting arrows?” said Lady Norbury, in her sleepy tone, always after the time in every thing, when the exclamation was quite forgotten by the few who had heard it. “Pray, Anne, does Lady Hauton mean to have an archery meeting at the Priory next summer?”

E lou corps Arragones
 E la parla Italiana
La Man e cara d'Angles
 E lou donzel de Toscana.”

, Georgiana's face, we believe, was as beautiful as her hands. I think it right to inform Mr. R. W * * * that my next work will be a poem, entitled

“The Loves of the Fingers.”

“ Can’t say, ’pon honour, Ma’am : Georgiana has never vouchsafed a word to me upon the subject, or I should have begun practising already.”

“ A most alarmingly dangerous species of amusement,” said the Duchess, with infinite solemnity. “ I deprecate most exceedingly all such hazardous sport.”

“ I am much flattered,” said Lord Norbury in the same tone, “ to find your Grace’s opinion so exactly coincide with mine : having myself, in my early youth, very narrowly escaped the loss of a right eye from one of those dangerous weapons called arrows, at an archery meeting in Warwickshire, at my noble friend’s the late celebrated Lord Balford :—it was no ignoble hand who shot against me, one whom, in my youth, I was proud to call my friend, the late most justly distinguished Mr. Windham, who to most extraordinary powers of mind united the utmost skill in all manly exercises. As a sportsman,

a dancer, an archer, a wrestler, in short, in every thing, he was what the renowned author of *Il Cortegiuno*, in the reign of our Eighth Henry, would have pronounced a perfect gentleman; with a strong spice too of natural chivalry, or what may be termed romance. But to return to my adventure, and in truth a somewhat perilous one, in which I was engaged with this most eloquent statesman."——

But it was a long story, as the reader has probably already discovered, and may also very likely be as tired of it as the poor Duchess was; and as the purport was to prove Mr. Windham's skill in archery, by his having nearly shot out one of Lord Norbury's round grey eyes, the narration may safely be left unfinished. Lord Norbury, like many other eloquent people, was always very long-winded when he meant to be particularly agreeable. His style of oratory on such occasions, more especially when addressed to persons of high rank, might be cha-

racterized as verbose, involved, and lengthy. The last, though an American word, is highly applicable to a Norbury-turned phrase.

The flight of arrows was at last over and forgotten ; Lord George became dull and gentlemanlike. Theatricals were again the order of the day, and when Romeo and Juliet had ranted together till they had tired themselves and every body else, Lady Tresilian and Colonel Montague delighted the company with the beautiful " Ombra adorata," of Frederici. She sang it with such pathos that Lionel was enchanted, yet Lady Norbury slept all the time. The Duchess only yawned *à plusieurs reprises*, and the Duke and Lord Norbury discussed drill husbandry in a sort of under-tone, meant not to be heard. Louisa listened to the music with rapture ; she was disposed to be pleased with every thing, as she still felt Lord George's pressure of her hand, when she glanced at the red mark on her little finger.

Luncheon came. On wet days in a country

house, people certainly eat *pour passer le temps*, and there is much to be said for them: and perhaps, if they avoid indigestion, it is altogether the best thing they can do, and it has the advantage of changing the conversation. But, after loitering as long as possible in the luncheon-room, they were still all in the same predicament: How to get rid of the enemy, Time! Louisa would have sung them the old refrain, *Que l'amour fait passer le temps*; though I fear the greater number would have pronounced that *le temps fait passer l'amour*, full as often. They all seemed to feel what Lord Dorville alone ventured to express:—that he was ready to hang himself for something to do.

Some went to the billiard-table, others to the stables, where, after talking some time to their grooms, the rain again drove them in. However, about four o'clock, there appeared a sort of disposition in the sky to clear, at least a little. The Duke of Derwent, and Lord Norbury, well armed with umbrellas, spencers, and

galoshes, issued forth to get a mouthful of air before dinner. There was a certain long avenue near the house, where the rain seldom penetrated, and, with cork soles, Lord Norbury pronounced there might be little danger. This was followed by a long and learned discourse upon cork soles and galoshes, their infinite convenience and general use, either for boots or shoes; but it may be omitted without loss of interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMPANY.

Dans un monde trompeur,
J'eus de la bonhommie,
Je parlai de l'honneur,
J'offris mon cœur ;
La bonne compagnie
Persifla ma folie.

Chanson par le Comte D'Adhemar.

ON the following day, the weather having proved fine, the ladies took a drive to Merton, and on their return were assembled in the drawing-room, when Fudge suddenly threw open the folding-doors, and announced Lady Margaret Carlton, and Mrs. Sydenham.

“What a bore !” said Lady Anne aside to Louisa ; “and so very late ; past five o'clock.

What, in the name of wonder ! can have made them come at such an extraordinary hour ?”

The ladies made their *entrée* in proper style ; the usual preliminaries of conversation were gone through in due form ; Lady Norbury was as cold and distant as possible ; Lady Margaret was very chatty, and meant to be very agreeable ; Mrs. Sydenham was all elegance, but too *manieré'd* for intimacy ; Lady Anne was out of humour, and therefore chose to be rude. Lady Glenmore had thrown herself completely back on the sofa, and feeling cold and unwell, had covered herself up entirely with a large shawl ; Louisa was next her, with her beautiful poodle, Marquis, on her lap ; the Duchess and Lady Mary sat both very perpendicularly upright in their chairs, with their hands crossed, looking as if they were playing at company and propriety. Lady Tresilian put down her book, and beckoned to Colonel Montague to come and talk to her. Lord Mordaunt edged round, so as to get on the next chair to Mrs. Sydenham. Lord Tresilian took up the newspaper, by way of something to

do. Lord Norbury seemed prepared to do the honours properly, *en grand seigneur* ; he assumed *l'air noble*. The Duke sat by his side, *en personnage muet*, willing to listen, and ready to smile. Lord Glenmore, perfectly at his ease, and in good will with every body, shook hands with Lady Margaret with the utmost cordiality, and seemed overjoyed to see her. Lord Hazlemere sat staring and yawning for some time, and then took out his pencil and paper, that he might sketch Mrs. Sydenham's profile and bonnet. She was a fine woman, he thought, and understood effect. *A has been*, to be sure ; but that, poor thing ! she could not help.

Mrs. Sydenham explained, with her usual grace, that she had called on Lady Margaret Carlton at Dean's-Mount, and finding that her ladyship was only waiting to see how the day turned out, before she commenced her drive to Norbury, in her pony-carriage, to bid them all adieu, she could not resist the pleasure of accompanying her ; particularly as Lady Margaret had kindly insisted on her

returning with her, and staying all night at Dean's-Mount. She had therefore sent her carriage and servants back to Elsinore Lodge, for fear Mrs. Metcalf and her dear Laura should be uneasy.

"Well, Lady Norbury," said Lady Margaret in the course of conversation; "and what do you say to this affair of Almack's? There is a fine to-do among the higher powers, I understand."

"I really do not know to what your ladyship alludes."

"Oh, my dear Madam! you must surely have heard of it. Lady Hauton's party has got the upper hand; and poor Lady Lochaber is to be dismissed from the sofa of honour!"

"Oh! is that all you mean? Yes, I believe somebody did say something about it, lately; or it was mentioned in a letter to Anne, I think; or else some of the gentlemen had heard of it? Which was it, Anne?"

"Really, mamma, it's such an old story, I don't remember. One can't feel interested about

that red-faced Lady Lochaber. I suppose, if there's any thing in it, Lady Hauton will write me word. Oh, Lord Hazlemere ! it was you who mentioned it, I remember now, as the last news from the Priory."

"Egad ! if I had ever heard it, I have quite forgotten it now," said his lordship with a conceited lisp ; "for, really, the stories at the Priory come in at one ear and go out at the other ; one's head isn't a resting-place in these days of bustle and commotion."

"Is that Lord Hazlemere?" said Mrs. Sydenham, with anxiety, to Lord Mordaunt. "I am—really—so very blind. Will you make me known to him?"

"Hazlemere, Mrs. Sydenham desires to be made known to you."

"Madam, you do me honour ;" and Lord Hazlemere looked full at her without giving a sign of recognition.

But Mrs. Sydenham was a match for him in assurance ; she never flinched during his gaze,

but turned to Lord Mordaunt, and in a soft hissing whisper she said, "Odd creature ! full of whim ! singularly entertaining—so sensible when he pleases !"

Lord Hazlemere, in return, half turned his face towards Louisa, and muttered between his teeth, "Devilish handsome !"

Then Mrs. Sydenham continued in a low voice to Lady Anne, on her other side, "Formerly we were quite intimate—at Brighton—the same opera box two years ago. Dear Laura—Very partial—Quite an admirer. Are you lately come from the Priory, my lord ?" to Lord Hazlemere.

"Last week, madam."

"How is dear Lady Hauton ? Have they a large party ?"

"Intolerably so !"

"Oh ! I see you have the good taste to like a select coterie:" then, in a whisper to Lord Mordaunt, "a little party of one's im-

mediate favourites, *un petit comitté*, is what we like."

This by-play was so amusing to those who followed it up, that Louisa thought she should have died in trying not to laugh; but Lady Margaret now continued in an angry tone—"Lady Lochaber has been most infamously treated, and though Lady Hauton is your ladyship's niece, I must say she has behaved very ill."

"Are you still talking about Almack's?" said Lady Norbury, in her most absent manner, smelling at her salts: "Really, I am so sick of hearing about those balls, that now I make a point of never listening to any thing that is said about them. Lady Hauton sends Anne tickets whenever she asks for them, and she always goes with her, so I escape the trouble. But pray, what has my niece been doing? I must know."

"Why, she is the cause of its being decided

that Lady Lochaber is no longer to be on the list of patronesses."

"And for what reason, pray, is she to be dismissed?"

"Because Lady Hauton chooses to say that Lady Lochaber admitted too many Scotch cousins."

"Well, really," said Lady Anne, "I must agree that her list was always composed of the strangest set! One can't quite wonder that Lady Hauton, who has lived so much abroad, and who has really a refined taste, should object to some of Lady Lochaber's queer-looking relations."

"And pray," said Lady Margaret with great warmth, for all her Scotch blood was up, "what sort of right has Lady Hauton to interfere? I should think Lady Lochaber's cousins were to the full as good as Lady Hauton's toadys."

"Oh! my dear Lady Margaret! what are you thinking about? Surely you could not be

at Almack's that famous night, when Lady Hauton entered with such a band of delightful foreigners. There were Prince and Princess Giuntotardi, the Duc and Duchesse of San Crispino, the Chevalier de Casa Longa, the Comte de Vilain Quatorze—"

"I know none of them," said Lady Margaret, "thank God! A set of foreign adventurers, who come here to seek their fortunes. Lady Lochaber would admit none but people of family."

"But good dancers and well-dressed women are what the lady patronesses want. Happily the *seize quartiers* are dispensed with in this country."

"Most delightful balls, Almack's!" said Mrs. Sydenham, in her silver tone, to the duchess, who, she thought, must find it dull.

"I dare say they are," was the answer; "but I never attend them."

"Lady Mary Derwent is, of course, always there?"

“ She never wishes to go.”

Poor Mrs. Sydenham was posed ; she had nothing more to observe, and the duchess put up her large green fan to screen her face from the fire, as if nothing farther could be said : it was a decided damper. Mrs. Sydenham felt that it was time to go ; there was a general move. The young ladies were putting away their work, the gentlemen had closed their books, one or two had even left the room, but Lady Margaret still lingered.

“ Almack's will quite go down,” continued her ladyship, “ if Lady Hauton is to have every thing her own way. Many people will refuse subscriptions.”

“ It will be well if they do,” said Lady Anne ; “ for last year it was much too full.”

“ I wonder what will happen next, if a woman of Lady Lochaber's rank and consequence is to be turned off, *sans cérémonie*, and all her friends refused ?”

“ Which they will certainly be, my dear

Lady Margaret, unless they are on the books of some other patroness. No presentations are to be allowed, nor any body to be permitted to ask for a friend ; so poor dear Lady Lochaber's cousins will have no hope, and may lay their plaid aside for another season."

" But you forget, they may go to the charity balls,—that will be their last resource," said Mrs. Sydenham, with a sneer : " ' A refuge for the destitute,' as Laura was observing the other day to Sir Harcourt Beresford. A charity ball, to buy Miss Bevil a new gown, would be no bad thing."

" A capital idea," said Lady Anne, " for the first Almack's ; when she will go, I suppose, as humble companion to the Lady Beaulieus. Really, so many of those kind of people were admitted last year, *demie fortunes* blessed with the boss of toadyism, that Almack's was getting quite vulgar. I have hardly decided whether I shall patronize it this year.—Shall you, Lady Mary?"

“ Oh ! I never think of going there. I should not choose to be refused, and, really, no ball is worth the fuss that is made about Almack's.”

“ But the fuss makes the pleasure,” said Lady Anne. “ The uncertainty attending your success ; getting a ticket when you know how many girls have been refused, who have superior pretensions to any you can boast ; the consciousness that you owe all your interest to your personal merit, your good looks, your *ton*, your taste in dress, your graceful dancing, or your lively wit. Oh ! there is nothing like Almack's after all, let mammas and chaperons say what they will. Old Ranelagh could not be half so delightful, though Mrs. Metcalf is always compassionating me for being born too late to enjoy that charming place.”

“ Hark ! there's the dressing-bell, I protest,” exclaimed Lady Norbury : “ I thought it must be very late.”

“ Dear, I am quite shocked !” said Lady

Margaret, ringing the bell with some violence ;
“ my watch must lose.”

How much unmerited blame is always cast on clocks and watches. “ You had better stay dinner,” said Lord Mordaunt aloud to Mrs. Sydenham ; “ it pours.”

“ Oh dear, no ! we don't mind rain ; we shall have the top up, and Lady Margaret drives very fast : though it is a merciless storm, indeed !” looking at Lady Norbury ; but she was deaf to all innuendoes, and said not a word.

“ Let the carriage come round immediately, if you please, Sir,” to a footman, “ with the top up, and the apron in front. Be so good as take out the umbrellas, the water-proof boots, and the plaids,” said Lady Margaret, sharply.

In five minutes more they were off in a most pelting shower. Lady Norbury, crossing her shawl, to prevent any injury to her chest from the damp, attended them with the utmost politeness to the hall door, to see with her own eyes how very fast it was raining.

“ Dear, how chilly !” said her ladyship, turning to the great roaring fire.

“ And yet you could let two women go away in an open carriage, in such a devil of a pelter, just at dinner time ! Strange creatures, certainly, you ladies are !” said Lord Mordaunt.

“ Commend me to the hospitality of the nineteenth century !” said Lord George.

“ Now is not Mrs. Sydenham a fine woman, Hazlemere ?” said Lord Mordaunt, in an *apart* to his friend, when all the others were going up stairs.

“ Yes ; she has been beautiful, and is still both a fine woman and a fine lady ; but I have always preferred the daughter.”

“ Ah ! then it is so, is it ? She said that Laura knew you very well ; and she told me to bring you to Elsinore next week.”

“ Oh ! I knew her, as one knows every body in London, of a certain set ; the first year Laura came out ; when she was so *pronéd* about. But

that's quite obsolete now, two years since. Laura's quite *passée*, an old stager now."

"*Passée!* my good fellow; she's not nineteen yet!"

"Very possibly; but, my dear Mordaunt, I shall not interfere with you. I see how it is. You think Mrs. Sydenham divine at eight-and-thirty, *et elle ne vous fera pas languir*. What would the Viscountess have said, had she been here to note the *œidllaes de part et d'autre?*"

"Pshaw! how ridiculous you are! As if one might not admire a woman of Mrs. Sydenham's age without being in love with her."

"Of Mrs. Sydenham's age, indeed!" said Lord Hazlemere, mimicking him; "much safer, let me tell you, to admire a woman of Miss Sydenham's age. Those experienced matrons, who have not always been correct, are dangerous people to play with, when even on the verge of forty."

"And who says she has not always been correct?"

“ Oh, I cry you mercy ! I thought it had been well known. At Stutgard, when Sydenham was minister, ages and ages ago, and she was the beautiful Adelaide something or other —there was a certain story, as I have been told, about a duel with the father, or the *amende honorable* ; and Sydenham was a peaceable man, that’s all : an every-day occurrence.”

“ Don’t believe a word of it,” said Lord Mordaunt, hastily.

“ Oh, it mayn’t be true ; or Sydenham mightn’t be to blame ; but the scandalous world said the marriage did not take place too soon, and that they had to hurry off to Dresden to hide appearances. I know Laura was born there, and had the King of Saxony for her godfather. After which, probably, nothing more was thought of the matter, for Mrs. Sydenham became quite the rage at court ; they lived years at Dresden. I went abroad the second time just before he was recalled, and I heard of nothing else but of *la belle épouse de votre ministre, femme qui avait*

bien fait parler d'elle, d'ailleurs très aimable ; and then a shrug, which means a great deal, though it says nothing. But it might be all scandal, regular cabal-work, because she was handsome, and rather gay. I was much at the house for a short time, and partly expected to have been the *cecisbeo de Madame*. Nay, don't stare so ! *c'était la mode alors ;—et même c'est la mode à présent*, as who knows better than you ? But to conclude,—this mature enchantress knows the world well, my dear Mordaunt ; therefore there will be some glory if you can fix her. I see clearly that Mrs. Sydenham would flirt with you either for herself or her daughter. But, by Jove, there's the dinner-bell, so we must make haste : though the women won't be ready yet, they went up so late. I hate your punctuality, of all things."

CHAPTER IX.

A DECLARATION.

“Fair lovers, you are fortunately met ;
Of this discourse we more will hear anon.”

Midsummer Night's Dream.

“I AM quite glad to see you look so well, Rosa,” said Lord Glenmore, when they were re-assembled ; “you have! got your blooming cheeks again, and I really begin to think we may safely venture to town next week.”

“You will be just in right time, then,” said Lord Mordaunt ; “for Almack’s is to begin the week after next.”

“Almack’s!” said Lord Hazlemere to Lady Anne ; “delightful word! Does not it make your heart beat even to hear it? There is no-

thing worth living for in town till the lady patronesses are arrived, and dear Lady Hauton is busy with her committees and her tickets."

"Fine life poor Lord Hauton must have in town!" said Lord Dorville. "Why, faith! one day he told me his wife was just like the Secretary of State for the Home-department: nothing but signing, sealing, and delivering, going on from morning till night."

"That used formerly to be the pass-word for a highwayman," said Lord Mordaunt; "commend me to Dorville for a *bon mot*; ha!-ha! ha! Why is a minister of state like a highwayman?"

"Very bad indeed!" said Lord Norbury, with offended dignity; "I abominate low wit."

"I am sure I meant no wit," replied Lord Dorville. "It's not my style, is it?" to Lady Anne. "But what I was saying was, that I should hate to have my wife one of your confounded lady patronesses. Why, Lord Hauton has told me he sometimes hadn't a footman or a groom left to do any thing; all busy about

that deuced Almack's! Very hard indeed! now wasn't it? Lady Anne, you wouldn't like to be a lady patroness, would you?"

"Is that meant for a proposal indirect to my sister, Dorville?" asked Lord Mordaunt, with mock solemnity.

"Dear me, no! I meant nothing at all."

"That I will swear you didn't," said Lord Hazlemere, satirically. "But can you suppose that Lady Anne would not like to possess that influence over the fashionable world, which being a lady patroness would give her as a matter of right? Power of any sort is never to be despised. To be a leader of the *haut ton* in London is certainly a proud situation."

"What an abuse of terms!" said Lord Glenmore; "how can you suffer yourself to talk such nonsense, Hazlemere. The system of Almack's is altogether the most unnatural coalition that ever existed in any society. A set of foolish women caballing together to keep the rest of the world in their trammels,

who have no kind of right to do so but what they choose to arrogate to themselves, is a very curious state of things, certainly ; but that they should have found hundreds of independent people silly enough to bend to their yoke, is the most extraordinary part of the story. I suppose, when I get to town, I shall have no peace till I have got tickets for Rosa."

"Allow me to save you all trouble of that kind," said Lord Hazlemere ; " I flatter myself I have interest sufficient to ensure Lady Glenmore a ticket whenever she wishes to honour Almack's with her presence."

"Now ! pray, Hazlemere, don't turn my little wife's head with any of your fine words. I don't mean Rosa to be an exclusive, or a leader of ton, or fashion, or any thing else. We are good, honest, country folks, who go to town to see the sights for a few weeks, and then mean to rusticate all the rest of the year. I suppose, my lord duke, you have not had much more to do with Almack's of late than myself."

“ Oh dear, no; I generally go to town in January, and leave it at Easter, before the fashionables arrive; and at that early season Almack's is not even named. But this year I am much interested about a bill, which I hope will pass the House this session; and therefore, for a wonder, I shall be in town till June. Puts me sadly out, though; I shall not be able to thin my plantation as usual.”

“ What can you do in town, Lady Mary, at that time of year?” said Lady Anne, yawning.

“ Oh, we have a great deal of dinner society. I go sometimes to public concerts, and to the Ancient Music; and I dare say you will be shocked to hear that I enjoy a good play extremely, and there is a private box at Covent-garden which is at my command.”

“ Well! to be sure, you are a thorough Goth! How do you manage about dinner?”

“ My father seldom dines later than six,” said Lady Mary; “ which I dare say you will pronounce dreadfully unfashionable. I assure

you, in my quiet way, I enjoy London extremely; but I am always delighted to go out of town the beginning of April."

"What, in the name of wonder! can you find to amuse yourself with in the country, then? All the neighbours must be in town."

"I enjoy the sweetness of the air, the bursting of the leaves, the first appearance of spring, certainly the most beautiful of all the seasons."

"Dear! how sentimental you are!" said Lady Anne.

"My dear Lady Mary, I honour your taste," said Lord Glenmore, smiling kindly at her; "we should all be better if we felt like you. The next step would be

'From Nature up to Nature's God.'

I think it is the excellent Paley who has observed that a strong feeling for the beauties with which God has surrounded us, is a first step towards religion."

Lady Mary's pale cheek was flushed for a moment; she was much flattered by Lord Glen-

more's notice, though pained at being brought forward thus publicly. When she ventured to look up, she saw Lady Glenmore's eyes were fixed upon her.

“ Why, Hazlemere, your uncle's quite a saint !” whispered Lord Mordaunt to his friend. “ Was he ever meant for a parson ?”

“ Since he has had so much to do with an angel,” returned the other, “ of course his thoughts must often be in Heaven.”

While the conversation had been going on, Lord and Lady Tresilian and Colonel Montague had formed a little coterie at the other end of this very long room. Lord George Fitzallan and Louisa Mildray were sitting by a small work-table, of course not far apart : each appeared to be reading, but Louisa did not seem much occupied with her studies ; she frequently looked up from her book, and whenever she did so, she invariably caught Lord George's eye : he said nothing, but he was always looking at her. This happened so often, that at last she felt

confused, and she would have moved to join the neighbouring trio, but somehow she seemed spell-bound where she was. At length, when there was a general buz of conversation going on all round the room, Lord George looked up boldly enough, and, seeing every one completely occupied, he ventured to say in a whisper to his companion:—

“ I say, Miss Mildmay, I am going away to-morrow : after Mordaunt’s match is over, we shall all dine, I suppose, at the club at Merton ; and then I go off.”

“ But you will be in town, won’t you ?” inquired the alarmed Louisa.

“ Oh ! I hope so ; but I must go off to headquarters directly, and then I don’t know what’s to become of me. I hear Killarney is at Paris : if he doesn’t come over, I must go to him. And then my father’s not very well at Dublin, and I want to see how he is going on : Lady Norbury has been teasing me to go over to Fitzallan Castle,—and, faith, I do want to speak to

him very much indeed, about something of great consequence to me,—to my future happiness,—to my prospects in life—I mean.” And he looked at her, as if he would have read her thoughts in her glowing face.

“ Well,” said Louisa, with almost breathless anxiety, “ then you mean to say that you are going to Dublin directly ?”

“ No, not directly ; though I ought certainly, but I may not be able to get leave yet. Still I think I must go at last. Unfortunately, we younger brothers are not our own masters : I wish I could only tell you all, and make you understand how I am situated. But Killarney has been such a spendthrift ! My father has been almost too good to him, he has left himself so little in his own power ; so that you see, I have not much to depend upon. I am sure you would like my father if you knew him,—‘ the good Lord Allandale ’ as he is called. I wish you knew him, Louisa.”

“ I wish I did,” said she timidly, with a sigh.

“The first time he ever called me Louisa,” was her secret thought, *en passant*.

“I wish to God I was independent!” said Lord George, drawing his chair quite close to her, “and that I had not been so extravagant; but, when one is young, one is so thoughtless!”

“Alas! but too true,” thought the sorrowful Louisa, as the tears stood in her beautiful eyes: but she could not speak a word.

“Nay, do not weep, now,” said he, tenderly taking her hand; “you have no idea how it distresses me; I cannot bear to see a woman weep. I did not mean to have said all this when I began, though I have been thinking about it all the evening. I have not read a word.”

“Nor I either,” thought Louisa.

“You go up to town next week with the Norburys, I find. Where does the Baron de Wallestein live?”

“In Portland-place.”

“I shall hear of you through Lionel; he is a good fellow, and a true friend to us both: he

has been urging me to this explanation for a long time ; it has been so on my mind. I shall call on you the moment I arrive in town, and how will you receive me, Louisa ?”

“ With the kindest of welcomes ; and so, I am sure, will Caroline.”

“ Yes, she was always my friend and protectress. She bade me live on hope, and so I will. You will not forget me, Miss Mildmay ? Promise me that ?”

“ Why so formal ? call me Louisa, and I will promise you any thing.”

“ Promise me then never, never to forget me ! Ah ! that I dared to call you my own Louisa ! But I know how it will be : you will be admired and followed in London ; you will have a crowd of foreigners at your feet : and then,

‘ Chi sa, se mai
Ti sovverrai di me ! ’ ”

He pressed her hand again, as he said these words.

Louisa felt rather angry. "You know best, Lord George, if you have any right to say this to me. Have I seemed to forget you? Is it generous to try to play with my feelings? Have you any right to bind me thus, while you, yourself—" She could not finish the sentence for her tears.

"By Heavens! you do me injustice," said Lord George, still detaining her unwilling hand. But at this moment Colonel Montague advanced towards the table, and poor Louisa, covering her face with her handkerchief, suddenly drew back her hand, and rushed out of the room.

Soon after, Lord Tresilian was heard in conversation with Colonel Montague. His lordship seemed to be speaking in reply. "But Almack's is supposed to contain all the *beau monde* of the country."

"And how would you describe good company generally?" enquired Lionel.

"Oh! in this country it is next to impossible; though I believe Lord Chesterfield defined it to

be that set which every one pronounces to be the next best to their own. In the Almack's acceptation, it means the friends, admirers, and toadies of the six lady patronesses, foreigners of all countries, and of all grades, who speak French, or broken English. If you do not belong to any one of these classes, vain are your pretensions : you can never be admitted *to be one of us.*"

" This institution," said Lady Tresilian, " has now existed ten years : and six self-elected female sovereigns have, during all that time, held the keys of the great world, as St. Peter was supposed to do those of the kingdom of Heaven. These ladies decide, in a weekly committee, upon the distribution of the tickets for admission : the whole is a matter of favour, interest, or calculation ; for neither rank, distinction, nor merit of any kind will serve as a plea, unless the candidate has the good fortune to be already upon the visiting book of one of these all-powerful

patronesses. Not to be known to one of the six, must indeed argue yourself quite unknown. But the extraordinary thing is that all the world of fashion should submit patiently to such a tyranny. What will not *ton* do!"

"*Ton* is indeed," said Lionel, "a cameleon, whose hue changes with every ray of light; a shade, or rather the shadow of a shade, that follows rank or fame."

"Almack's is a system of tyranny," said Lady Tresilian, "which would never be submitted to in any country but one of such complete freedom that people are at liberty to make fools of themselves. No government would ever have had the effrontery to suppose that people would, on their knees, crave permission to pay their money to a junto, self-elected, whose power exists but by courtesy; who make laws, and enforce them too, without any sort of right. A cabal may attempt a monopoly, *that* I can understand; but that

submission to it should be considered as a subject for congratulation, is indeed past my comprehension."

"It is said," observed Lord Tresilian, "that a certain foreigner, of high rank and distinguished talents, who came over here in an official situation, determined not to submit to the London trammels of fashion. He had no idea, he said, of such a slavery; he would be an independent man, and live with whom he pleased;—but he was obliged to give in. He found it was a tyranny established upon a much firmer basis than he could have conceived. I heard him exclaim, '*Qu'est-ce que la gloire! il n'y en a donc plus! Quand on a vu le Conquerant d'Austerlitz mourir à St. Hélène, et son vainqueur content de se mettre sur la liste des élégantes d'Almack's, on peut bien dire, 'Il n'y a plus de gloire!'*'"

"A thousand thanks," said Colonel Montague, "for all the useful information your lordship and Lady Tresilian have given me. The

wizard Almack's will have no power over me; I shall not desire an 'Open Sesame' on my account."

"No rash vows!" said Lady Tresilian; "when once Fashion has waved her wand over you, there is no escape. You will find, with the Viscount de C——, that however you may murmur, there is no getting rid of your chains. I will venture to predict that I shall live to see you whispering soft nonsense in a lady patroness's ear. Remember what the dandy Muse of fashionable life has said, and I can assure you she speaks truth:—

'All on that magic word depends,
Fame, fortune, fashion, lovers, friends;
If once to Almack's you belong,
Like monarchs you can do no wrong;
But banish'd thence on Wednesday night,
By Jove! you can do nothing right.'"

CHAPTER X.

THE DEPARTURE.

“ 'Tis done; they step into the welcome chaise,
Loll at their ease behind four handsome bays.”

LADY GLENMORE had fixed her mind on going to London next week; his lordship would much rather have stayed quietly in the country. In taking leave of the party, Lord Glenmore particularly distinguished Lady Mary Derwent. “ May I hope,” said he, “ that when we are in town, Lady Glenmore will see a great deal of you, my dear Lady Mary? She is so young, and has so few acquaintance, that your society will be of the greatest consequence to her; and as you say that you like a quiet family party, I

trust you will often favour us by joining ours. Rosa's situation will not allow of her going much out this spring, into public at least—in-
deed I hope she will not wish it; and therefore we must try and make our home agreeable to our friends."

Lady Mary felt much flattered by this distinction; and it really was one, for Lord Glenmore was proverbially nice in the choice of his society; there were so few of whom he really approved. Her ladyship readily promised to be at Lady Glenmore's commands whenever she might wish to have her. The marquis begged Louisa would remember him very kindly to his good old friend Mr. Mildmay; "Tell him," said he, "that if all goes on well, I shall hope to have a merry christening at Glenmore Place next summer, and he must promise to come to it, gout or no gout. Must not he, my dear Rosa?"

Lady Glenmore assented, as she shook Louisa kindly by the hand; and hoped they should

meet at Almack's the week after next; "and then you will introduce me to Madame de Wal-lestein," said she, "for Lord Hazlemere tells me she is so beautiful. Oh! and you must promise to procure me an introduction to the great heiress Miss Birmingham, for I shall want so much to go to her balls!"

"Thank God! we escaped all politics," said Lord Norbury to the duke, who had been employed in looking over a large map of the county of H——: "your grace was approaching the debateable land last night, when you named the borough of Upmore."

"I meant nothing of the sort, though," said the duke, with much simplicity; "and I hope now all party-strife between us is at an end. Tresilian will continue member of the city of H——, as long as I live; and Glenmore and I were on such good terms, that when I wished him good-bye, I told him I hoped Sir William Grandison meant to stand again the next par-

liament ; as I thought the county of H—— would not easily find so good a member.”

“ My lord duke, that was most magnanimously done of your grace,” said Lord Norbury very pompously ; “ I am delighted to find that such unanimity should prevail between two such mighty interests.”

This was, however, a decided falsehood ; for in his heart, the manœuvring Earl of Norbury would much rather have seen his two rivals enemies than friends. “ Divide and prosper,” was his favourite maxim : however, he was too great a master of the art of seeming, not to know that it was proper to rejoice in the public weal ; and it was decidedly a good thing for the county that two such great aristocrats should agree to keep the peace.

“ Where are Lord and Lady Tresilian ?” enquired Lady Norbury.

“ I beg pardon,” said Colonel Montague, “ for being so bad a messenger ; but they beg-

ged me to make their apologies to your ladyship for not waiting to take leave of you. Their curricule came to the door when you were all in the green-house, and they were afraid of being late, for they meant to go by Derwent Broad Oak, as Lady Tresilian has never seen that pretty little bit of the old forest ; and as it is a long way round, they trusted you would excuse their not seeing you again : they charged me with a thousand apologies."

" I am sure there was no occasion," replied the countess, very graciously ; " I always wish every body to consult their own convenience. Lady Tresilian seems to have a great taste for trees, and views, and all that sort of thing."

" I believe she draws very well," said the duchess, " at least I am told so ; but I understand nothing about the matter !"

Shortly after, Lionel made a signal to Louisa, from the window, that he wished to speak to her.

“Could you come into the next room for a moment?”

To this she consented ; when he informed her of the necessity of his immediate departure for town, in order to his being present at the Baron de Wallestein's first diplomatic dinner: could he be the bearer of any communication to Bishop's-Court, which he intended taking in his way? Louisa sat down and wrote a hasty note, which she was in the act of delivering into his hand, when the door opened, and Lady Norbury and Lady Anne made their appearance.

“Here they are!” said Lady Anne; “I thought we should find them together: upon my word, a tolerable long *tête-à-tête* you two have had, but I hope you have settled all your business quite satisfactorily. Colonel Montague, poor Fudge has been hunting you all over the house for the last quarter of an hour, to tell you that your horses are waiting at the

door ; and as for the Duchess and Lady Mary, Louisa, they were *au désespoir* that they could not take leave of you in proper style."

"What ! are they gone ?" said Louisa, with surprise.

"Gone, my dear, some time since ; and there has been a general search for Miss Mildmay and Colonel Montague."

"Dear ! I am shocked to have given so much trouble ; but, as Lionel was going to Bishop's-Court, I had a note to write to my father."

Lady Anne smiled, as they followed Colonel Montague to the door to see him off. When they returned to the drawing-room, she said to her friend, with an arch look, "Well, I hope the Colonel pleaded the cause of his *protégé* successfully ; he was some time about it at least."

"How little you know him, Lady Anne ! that is the last thing you need suspect him of doing."

“What ! does he disapprove ? Oh the monster ! I suppose he talks of prudence, and other obstacles : knows nothing of love : too cold and correct, one might guess it by his look.”

“Indeed ! you are mistaken now *in toto*,” said Louisa.

“Well, thank God ! at last they ’re all gone,” said Lady Norbury, with more vivacity than was common to her. “I must say, company in the country is a great fatigue ; playing at conversation all day long is such a bore. Now I shall have time to answer some letters before we go to town.”

And this was all that was expressed upon the breaking up of so very agreeable a party : certainly, nothing can be more heartless than the intercourse of society in this polite and fastidious age.

The next few days were devoted to packing and arrangements. Every one knows that the last week before a removal is positive purgatory.

It is the tax paid for comforts: so the ladies thought it at least, but not Lord Norbury; he never felt his own consequence so fully, as when the whole household were in motion, and he alone could sit still and inspect their labours. Then, too, after six months' retirement in a country house, always full of company, he longed to be once more in the busy world again, in the midst of intrigue and politics. The quiet Lady Norbury was in a different state: in the country she reminded one of a dormouse in a state of torpor, but her faculties seemed to recover their tone in her own set in town. The trouble of the removal was, however, a vast bore; and with her own good will she never would have moved farther from Portman Square, than Kensington Gardens; that was quite country enough for her.

. Lady Anne and Louisa were each impatient to be in London: the former looked forward to fresh lovers, and fresh conquests; the latter meant to seek consolation in the bosom of a

confiding friend. Agreeable foreign diplomatic society might, perhaps, pass away some time, not unprofitably; but lovers were to be all forsworn, and military dandies *à la moustaches* to be particularly avoided.

The morning of departure arrived, and heavily loured the thickening clouds big with the fate of imperials and trunks.

The carriages came to the door properly laden with every kind of shining leather convenience, Heaven knows what are their respective names; no adventures of any sort impeded their progress, and on the second afternoon the Norbury family reached the mighty Babylon of the modern world.

A fashionable aspirant once observed, that the dandy who could go down Highgate Hill (before the tunnel was made, I should suppose) without feeling his heart flutter, as he anticipated all the glories of the future, was a being little to be envied.

Far be from me or my friends such frigid

philosophy, as can approach unmoved those scenes of fashion where beauty and ton assert their proud pre-eminence : that belle must be devoid of taste or feeling, whose vivacity will not become more sparkling as she whirls rapidly down Regent Street, or whose eyes will not flash with greater brilliancy when she first views the countless throngs of charming loungers in fool's fair.

“ And you, ye knockers, that with brazen throat
The welcome visitor's approach denote,
All hail! ye quality of high renown,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious town;
Dandies and lady-killers now may reign,
And let the Norb'rys be themselves again!”

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAMILY IN PORTLAND PLACE.

“ Here all are taught an avarice of praise,
They please, are pleas'd, they give to get esteem,
'Till seeming blest, they grow to what they seem.”

GOLDSMITH.

ON the morning after their arrival in town, the Earl of Norbury requested Louisa, on her taking leave of the family, to inform the Baron de Wallestein, that he intended to do himself the honour of leaving his card for his excellency, the first day he should be able to get as far as Portland Place. He believed that might be the right situation for an Ambassador, but for any man whose circle of visits was somewhat extensive, it was a peculiarly inconvenient part of the

town. The Countess was so much occupied in correcting her visiting-book, that she hardly condescended to take any farther notice of Louisa's acknowledgements, than a slight inclination of the head, when that young lady left the room. But Lady Anne was all warmth and kindness.

“ I shall hope often to see you during the season, my dear Louisa; as my father always courts the diplomats, we shall, doubtless, be acquainted with these Wallesteins: I dare say we shall give them a dinner. Of course the Baroness will be able to get you to Almack's; if not, write to me. But what am I thinking of? Lady Hauton is always so much with the foreign set, that I should think she will admit your friend even to her particular *coterie*, where, I can assure you, her own mother and sisters are not allowed the *entrée* now! Pray take my advice, and cut the Birmingham connexion as much as you can; leave them to your sister and Colonel Montague.”

Madame de Wallestein's carriage came at the appointed hour, and Miss Louisa Mildmay and her attendant, the smiling Eloise, were soon transported to one of the handsomest houses in Portland Place. The establishment, and every thing connected with it, appeared to be *magnifiquement monté*, and the whole presented a happy specimen of the advantages derived from a judicious union of the Continental and English styles of living.

Louisa was greeted in the kindest manner by Felix, an old Frenchman, who was really delighted to see her. “*Enchanté de vous revoir, Mademoiselle, et si bien portante. Madame est sortie, mais je vais prévenir Mademoiselle Flore de votre arrivée.*”

A very smart and coquettish *femme de chambre* entered, with the true Parisian air.

“*Bon jour, Mademoiselle, j'espère que j'ai l'honneur de vous voir en bonne santé? Madame la Baronne sera si fâchée d'être sortie, car elle*

croyait être de retour long temps avant l'arrivée de Mademoiselle."

" Et Madame de Wallestein, comment se porte-t-elle ? et le cher petit Gustave ? et Ulrique, est-elle bien grandie ?"

" Oh, ils sont tous les deux des petits amours, les plus beaux enfans du monde, et Madame est encore bien la plus jolie femme de Paris : mais vous-même, Mademoiselle, vous êtes toujours fraîche comme une rose. Si j'osais, je dirais que si c'était possible, Mademoiselle Louise est même embellie. Comme Madame va être contente, elle ne manquera plus de personne. M. le Colonel, son frère, n'est-il pas arrivé la semaine passée ? il déjeune ici presque tous les matins ; et puis c'est un train avec nos enfans, la bonne ; Mademoiselle se souvient probablement de Nanette la Normande ; oh ! pour celle-là elle aime bien M. le Colonel, et puis c'est un jeune homme si estimable du côté des mœurs, M. le Baron dit que c'est bien l'ami le plus sûr, le frère le plus tendre. Ah ! Mademoiselle celui-là fera bien un bon mari."

And the black eyes of Mademoiselle Flore cast a very intelligent glance at Louisa, but she took no notice.

“ Caroline, est-elle allée se promener, ou fait-elle des visites ? ”

“ Je ne saurais vous dire précisément. M. le Baron et Madame la Baronne sont sortis à pied tout-à-fait à la mode Anglaise, pour jouir de votre beau pavé. Monsieur donnait tout mari-talement le bras à Madame, qui était si bien arrangée que chacun se retournait pour l'admirer, et M. le Colonel de l'autre côté, qui tenait à la main le petit Gustave, et Nanette qui suivait avec Mademoiselle Ulrique dans ses bras, et M. le Baron avec son air franc et jovial, qui paraissait si fier de tous les siens, oh, c'est un heureux ménage que le notre, Dieu merci ! ”

Louisa smiled ; Mademoiselle Flore paused a moment to collect both breath and ideas, and then proceeded.

“ Madame est si leste à present, sa petite taille s'est si bien conservée, qu'elle danse comme à

seize ans. Oh ! nous avons eu des bals si brillans, Mademoiselle, cet hiver à Paris : tout le monde s'est divertì à l'envi l'un de l'autre. C'est vraiment la première année depuis que j'ai l'honneur de servir Madame la Baronne, depuis le moment de son mariage avec Monsieur de Wallestein, qu'elle a été en état de jouir du carnaval, mais depuis le mois de Décembre elle ne nourrit plus la petite. Vraiment j'étais charmée de voir la fin de tout cela. Cette contrariété journalière lui faisait perdre sa fraîcheur, elle n'osait danser pendant tout l'été aux fêtes de village : quelquefois l'enfant la retentait à la maison, quand il faisait si beau pour la promenade, puis déranger sa toilette même après le diner. Oh ! c'était une gêne ennuyeuse, mais à présent que tout cela est passé, on n'y pense plus. Mais pour moi, Mademoiselle, c'est mon affaire de songer à tout, je vous avoue que je tremble par fois de crainte qu'une nouvelle grossesse ne vienne déranger tous nos projets, Dieu veuille seulement qu'il n'y en ait point pour

long-temps, pour bien long-temps, mais on dit qu'en Angleterre——”

Louisa, however, thought she had heard enough, and therefore ventured to interrupt Mademoiselle Flore's intended dissertation on the inconvenient size of most English families, by requesting to be shown to her apartment. “*Ah ! Mademoiselle va être si contente, car c'est vraiment un petit boudoir divin.*”

And so it was ; for Louisa found every comfort and elegance which the most refined taste could suggest, in the little dressing-room which adjoined her bed-room :—a cabinet pianoforte, a small bookcase filled with books, an *écritoire*, or I believe, according to Soho's new designation of these luxurious comforts, I should say, a Davenport ; a beautiful little *déjeuner* of *Sevre* china, a stand with green-house plants, a bouquet of flowers on the chimney-piece, besides an elegant little ornament intended for the burning of pastilles, screens, foot-stools, a

bergere, a small ottoman;—nothing was wanting. The bed-room was equally elegant; the bed-curtains were of sprigged muslin and flounced, they were lined with rose colour.

Eloise was in ecstasy, unpacking her trunks, and talking all the time, delighted with every thing she saw; “*On ne trouverait pas même un plus joli boudoir à Paris, n'est-ce pas, Mademoiselle? Oh! comme nous serons bien ici.*”

Then came the greeting between the two *femmes de chambre*, both equally voluble and communicative; and certainly every Frenchwoman can contrive to tell more in a given time than the inhabitant of any other country.

The Baroness soon returned home, and the meeting between the two friends was as warm and affectionate as might be expected. Madame de Wallestein could not take her eyes off her dearest Louisa. “*Que tu es charmante! quel teint de lis et de rose; tu me donnes l'idée du printemps. Oh! que n'étais-tu à Paris cet hiver, ma chère amie!*”

Louisa blushed very prettily, and returned the compliment *très gracieusement*, on the score of elegance, fashion, and that nondescript charm of Paris, *une tournure parfaite, si distinguée*.

The gentlemen all dined out; so the two friends were left to take their repast *tête-à-tête à côté du feu* in the back drawing-room. Those delightful inventions, entitled dumb-waiters, permitted them to indulge in the full flow of confidential intercourse. Each of the ladies had volumes to tell; and though the Baroness confessed “that she was condemned to speak English for her sins, as the Baron insisted upon it now she was in England;” yet she seldom got through a sentence without interlarding it with French, so thoroughly foreign had she become in the course of a few years. She was full of her own happiness; the Baron was the best of husbands, so kind, so attentive!—“*Ah!*” said she, with her eyes full of tears, “*ma chère Louise, qu’ai-je fait pour mériter un sort si heu-*

reux. Que je voudrais te trouver un pareil mari! parles-moi donc de ce petit roué, si aimable, ce Lord George. What has he been about all this time? Has he proposed?"

Poor Louisa! It was a sad story, and required some time to tell properly; but she had a most indulgent audistress, and she wished herself so much to get it over.

Madame de Wallestein's indignation at Lord George's conduct may be imagined, as well as her various exclamations; but she took it up differently to what Louisa intended.

"N'y pensons plus," said she, with a decided gesture; *"un infidèle est vite remplacé heureusement. I shall soon find you another, my love, un parti plus brillant;* for, after all, Lord George is but a younger brother."

But this was far from being Louisa's intention, and she battled the point with much spirit during the rest of the evening: "I shall never like any body else, Caroline, never, never!"

A note was now brought in for Louisa; it

was from Julia, in answer to one she had written to announce her arrival in town. Miss Mildmay hoped to see her sister early on the morrow; but, if she did not call in Regent-Street before two, Lady Birmingham promised to go to Portland Place the first thing she did when she went out. Julia was all impatience to see Louisa, as well as her old friend Caroline; and Barbara was most anxious to be introduced to the latter.

“We can walk there after breakfast to-morrow,” said Madame de Wallestein, “*c’est à dire, s’il fait beau. Mais à-propos de cette famille de Birmingham.* I have always had a sort of horror of them; but really the daughter must be a most amiable creature, as well as *remplie de talens*. I have had the most flattering attention from her, as well as the most valuable present. Do you know, Louisa, that she has sent me a most beautiful copy of my dear mother’s picture, done by herself, from the one by Sir Joshua, which is at Atherford Abbey? I found

this picture, when I arrived in town last week, with the sweetest note from Miss Birmingham, inclosed in one from Julia. I own, I never was more delighted in my life. Of course, I wrote to thank her for it, and expressed myself most warmly upon the occasion; and I have called at the Birmingham warehouse, as the world have nicknamed that great, heavy, staring, stone-building, with those enormous columns, which seem to support nothing: and they returned the visit two days ago. But we were gone to Richmond, to stay a week or two with the Bavarian minister, who is Wallestein's bosom-friend, while our servants were unpacking; so we missed each other again; and since I came to town, *j'ai été tellement accablée d'affaires*, that I have not had a moment for any body. I should have called there yesterday, but I thought I had better wait till you came to town."

"And where is the picture? I long to see

it, now that it is finished and framed, for I superintended the progress of the painting."

"Oh, but your first view must not be by candle-light. It is to be hung up to-morrow: Lionel is to decide where will be the best light. I want to have it as a pendant to the one which was painted at Paris of my poor father; we brought that with us, as well as the Guido; the two Canalettes we left packed up at the banker's at Paris; your old friend, Rougemont."

"Was Lionel pleased with the portrait?"

"Pleased! *il était en extase!* you never saw such raptures as the man displayed. And then he has been praising this Miss Birmingham so violently. Let's see! what's her name? Oh, Barbara; a sad name too! but I hope she will not prove *barbara per lui*: such an amiable, retiring character, so gentle and loveable. You know my brother's sort of praise of women; he is all for the passive virtues; no French *belle* ever pleased him—too much art and vivacity,

un genre trop prononcé, nothing feminine, no attractive bashfulness. Yet all this English reserve is but another sort of coquetry—a round-about road to the same thing; up a steep hill, which is not worth the trouble to ascend, the view is so barren from the top. In France, il n'y a rien de grand, rien d'exalté dans le voyage de la vie, mais au moins les sentiers en sont parsemés de roses."

Louisa smiled.

"Well, *du moins, je t'ai fait sourire; mais allons donc, conte moi tout cela.* Has Lionel a *tendresse* for this Miss Birmingham, do you think? will it do? What will she have? Flore told me yesterday, that his servant declared that all the ladies at Norbury had been making the *aimable* to his master; but that the talk of the country was, that the great heiress at the Abbey was the one he preferred to them all. Do you think so? Come, put up your work, Louisa, and tell me all about it. *Le coin du feu* is the right place for such confessions."

Louisa told all she knew, all she surmised, all she expected, and all she hoped. The past, the present, and the future, were fully discussed, before the ladies retired to their apartments.

“ Mon Dieu ! comme le Baron rentre tard ce soir ! ” said Madame de Wallestein, as she rang for candles, and glanced at the clock upon the chimney-piece. *“ Je ne l’attendrai plus, c’est décidé, allons nous coucher ! ”* Really the lateness of the London hours, and these horrid men-dinners, are enough to drive one crazy. Ah ! in Paris we do these things so much better.”

The morning came—a bright, fine, sunny day, when even thick, gloomy London put on a cheerful appearance. The Baroness wanted Louisa to spend the morning with her in her dressing-room—a delightful little apartment, with a wide Venetian window, commanding a side view of the Regent's Park. Here she found M. de Wallestein, who had come to read the newspaper up-stairs, on purpose that he

might pay his compliments to her. He was a remarkably handsome man, dark, with a fine expressive eye, and intelligent countenance. His manner was open and frank—a sort of mixture of the foreigner and the Englishman; for, though very well bred, he had not the least pretension or affectation, but he was a remarkably sensible person, always intent on procuring information, yet never anxious to push himself forward—in that respect very different to a Frenchman. He was quite free from vanity, but had a great deal of pride—pride of illustrious descent, pride of self-earned distinction, and, above all, pride of talent. He understood English perfectly; but he had, in some degree, lost the habit of speaking it fluently; yet, notwithstanding this, he was much fonder of practising it than was his English wife. To be completely French in every thing was her only ambition. The Baron was very partial to Louisa, and received her with the utmost kindness, expressing much pleasure that

Madame de Wallestein should have so agreeable a companion to console her for her absence from Paris. He said this with a sort of smile, and then returned to the newspaper.

Louisa seated herself on the sofa beside her friend, she had so much to hear of foreign news—about the fashion and the theatres! the balls! the flirtations! the marriages! and last, not least, the military!—those first features in French society. Who has ever heard two Englishwomen discuss Paris without being absolutely startled by the alarming sounds of Lanciers, Cuirassiers, Chasseurs, Gardes du Corps, Gardes à Cheval, Gardes Royales. The whole corps militaire appear to be drawn out for the amusement and inspection of the ladies. Long, very long may it be

“ Their humble province still to tend the fair ;
Not a less pleasing, though less glorious care,”

than those which once occupied these still martial-looking heroes. How the ladies of Paris

existed formerly, when all these whiskerandos were practising their arts of love and war on foreign service, I cannot imagine ; for now, who can deny that, in these happy times of peace, 'tis they alone that

“ Assist their blushes, and inspire their airs ? ”

In a moment the door was thrown open rather abruptly by Nanette, the Norman nurse, and in ran the spirited little Gustavus, Madame de Wallestein's eldest child, a lovely boy of four years old, who, without an idea of shyness, ran up to Louisa to ask her, in very good English, to give him a kiss. Presently after appeared M. de Wallestein's private secretary, the handsome Count Alphonso de Rosenval, carrying the little Ulrica in his arms, a playful infant, about a year old, whom he was bringing to see her dear mamma. The Baroness took the child from him, and M. de Rosenval ventured, with the utmost respect and

timidity, to recall himself to the *souvenir* of *Mademoiselle Louise*.

This youth was *le plus joli garçon de Paris*. His mother, a Frenchwoman of high rank, had married a German nearly connected with M. de Wallestein's family. She had been left a young and beautiful widow with one son ; and on account of Alphonse's education she had settled at Paris, where, a few years afterwards, she had given her hand to an officer of distinction and merit. *Le Général Duport* adopted Alphonse for his son, and he took care that he should receive, what is called in France, *l'éducation la plus distinguée*, while his mother devoted her time to society and dress. However, on the arrival of M. de Wallestein at Paris, she exerted all the influence of her *beaux yeux* to persuade him to take her son as one of his *attachés*, which he did, and on removing to London, M. de Rosenval was promoted to be his private secretary. He was *rempli de petits*

talens, un danseur parfait, a good musician, a tolerable poet. He had *beaucoup de sentiment*, and *le ton le plus distingué*. In short, he was that most dangerous of beings, an agreeable Frenchman, devoted to the society of the female sex ; of course, therefore, an adept at flattery, and knowing how to turn every woman's head without ever losing his own.

His dress, for the dress of dandies is *l'article essentiel après tout*, was just studied enough to excite observation, and nothing more. It was always in the best taste, and so were his perfumes, and his horse, and his spurs, and every thing belonging to him. The Baron de Wallestein loved him as if he were his son, but always laughed at him. The Baroness did not dare exactly to love him, but she liked him, and flattered him : he, in return, admired *Madame de Wallestein* at a humble distance, *avec beaucoup de retenue* ; but he loved the children. And he had also often ventured to like *Mademoiselle Louise* very much indeed, as

much as he had always disliked Lord George Fitzallan.

The Baroness was in high beauty this morning, *très bonne mine*; the young Count kissed her fair hand with much grace, while he bowed in the most respectful manner to her lovely friend.

“*Ah ! Madame, quelle jolie toilette que la vôtre ; un goût si exquis ! une simplicité ! mais vous êtes mise comme un ange !*”—all the time arranging his own studiously dishevelled locks, as he admired himself in the glass over the chimney-piece, and saw that all was right ; while little Gustavus was pulling him by the flaps of his coat behind.

Madame de Wallestein was, indeed, a very pretty woman. She had small but regular features, with the most brilliant hazel eyes, which she knew how to use, with as much effect as could be expected from a thorough adept in all the arts of foreign coquetry. She was a brunette in complexion ; but her skin was exquisitely

clear, with the finest natural bloom, the result of perfect health. Her mouth was peculiarly beautiful, and, when she smiled, she had a particularly *spirituelle* expression of countenance. To these advantages she added very fine hair, which was always arranged with the most perfect neatness and precision. She was of a pretty height and size, with the most firm upright little figure; and her head was so remarkably well set on, that it gave an uncommon smartness to her whole appearance. She used a good deal of action in her conversation, but whatever she did was elegant, and whatever she said, pleasing.

She was always dressed with the greatest care, and the most studied simplicity; so that there was a kind of *apprêtée* look about her, as if she were going to sit for her picture, and was well pleased with the general effect of her charms. “*Ce petit air de triomphe sied si bien à Madame la Baronne,*” said M. de Roserval one day to the Prince Alfred de Stein-

berg, who was Secretary of the Legation, "*cela lui est si naturel ! Elle se réjouit de ses grâces. Ah, quelle heureuse existence que celle d'une jolie femme jusqu'à trente ans ! et après cela, comme dit quelqu'auteur Français, j'aimerais mieux être homme.*"

"My dear children, what a noise you make !" said the Baroness, speaking English quite naturally, as she fondled her little girl, and looked at Gustavus, who was at high romps with Louisa and M. de Rosenval, with a mother's smile of satisfaction. "My sweet Ulrica, what a figure you have made of mamma already ! why, I am not fit to be seen ! What will Mademoiselle Flore say ?"

"Never mind !" said M. de Wallestein, looking up from the newspaper ; "who cares for dress or *femmes de chambre* in England ? Thank God ! we have left the land of foppery ; here we may be quite *au naturel*. *Ma chère amie, je suis enchanté de te voir tout-à-fait à l'Anglaise entourée de tes enfans, et bien fière d'être l'heu-*

reuse mère de deux si jolies créatures. Croyez moi, ma Caroline, cela vaut mieux que toutes les fêtes. What sensible woman would ruin her health at balls, when she could be so properly engaged and happy at home ?”

The Baroness rose from her seat, and, advancing towards her husband, she held out the little Ulrica for him to kiss.

“ Là ! mon cher mari philosophe, embrasse ta petite fille, afin qu'elle aille se coucher.”

The Baron tenderly caressed his child first, and then his wife; and the rosy-faced Ulrica was given to Nanette.

“ Quelle scène attendrissante ! n'est-ce pas, Mademoiselle ?” said the sentimental young Count, who stood with his back to the fire, and arranged his cravat; and looked kindly, first at his boots and next at Louisa : *“ Ces Allemands font de bien bons maris, n'est-ce pas ?”*

“ Et les Anglaises sont des femmes charmantes !” said Louisa slyly; much amused with the difference between French and English manners.

“ Well ; certainly the papers of this country are very ridiculous ! ” said the Baron de Wallestein. “ *C'est si bête, tout cela.* ”

“ What is the matter ? ” enquired Louisa.

“ Why, what can be so perfectly absurd as all the fuss that is made with the *beau monde* ? Such nonsense. I must read you this from the Morning Post ; under the head of Fashionable Intelligence. ‘ We understand that the new Austrian ambassador, the Baron de Wallestein, and his beautiful Lady, are arrived at their magnificent mansion in Portland Place from Brighton. The Baroness, we are informed, has been of late one of the leading *belles* of the higher circles at Paris, a *distinguée* among the *Dames du château* ; we may therefore expect that his lady will prove a new and brilliant star in the horizon of fashion, during the ensuing season in London. ’ — What stuff ! then in another corner we are put in among the departure list, as they call it, from Brighton. You, Miss Mildmay, are announced as having arrived safely at the Baron de Wal-

lestein's, from the Earl of Norbury's seat in H——shire. M. de Rosenval's name stands in great letters by itself, as the only Baron who honoured the last Almack's with his presence, and, we regret to say that distinguished ball was very thinly attended ; but it is some consolation to suppose that it was owing to the near approach of the Easter holidays.'

"Then a little below follows : ' We are happy to see that the princely mansion of the Marquis of Glenmore, in St. James's Square, is now quite ready for the reception of its noble owner and his family. It has lately undergone a complete repair, and has been newly furnished, in a style of superior elegance, under the direction of that accomplished man of taste, Mr. Soho. The distinguished nobleman to whom it belongs, has not inhabited it since his much to be lamented retirement from official duties, when he abandoned the turmoils of public life, for the noble groves and inspiring solitude of his magnificent seat, Glenmore Place,

in the county of H——: and the town residence has been wholly deserted, except for a short period every season, when it has been occupied by some of his lordship's numerous friends or connexions. But on the occasion of the worthy Marquis's marriage, last summer, orders were received by Mr. Soho, to refit the mansion entirely, without loss of time; which he has executed in a manner befitting the high rank of its noble owner.'

“Did you ever read such nonsense! The next paragraph is as follows—‘Almack's may be expected to recommence after Easter with the utmost spirit, and with additional *éclat*; for we are delighted to have it in our power to congratulate the leaders of fashion on the arrival of the Countess of Hauton, at her house in Connaught Place, from the Priory. Her ladyship is in high force, fully equal to the labours of her official situation, as President of the Committee of Ladies Patronesses of the balls at Almack's. We understand that the ballot will shortly take

place for the election of a new Lady Patroness, in the room of the much-respected Countess of Lochnaber. We therefore trust that the late cause of dissension in the female cabinet is thus entirely removed; and that the public will do justice to the very excellent arrangements likely to be adopted by the Countess of Hauton.'

"Then we have—'Birmingham House. This greatly to be admired residence is now completed, and its unequalled decorations, both exterior and interior, we may venture to pronounce, are decidedly unique, both for design and execution. The fashionable Lady Birmingham will after Easter open her splendid suite of rooms to the *haut ton*, for the purpose of introducing her daughter, the lovely and accomplished Miss Birmingham. This young lady, it is presumed, will be the general magnet of attraction, as fame speaks largely of the amount of her expectations.' The idea of puffing off a young heiress, as an itinerant hawker would do his goods! it is really preposterous; but these

newspapers appear to make free with every thing. Then follows another—‘The three Graces, whose personal charms excited such universal admiration at the last ball at Almack’s, were the Ladies Olivia, Agnes, and Madelina Beaulieu, the daughters of the Earl of Beaulieu. It will be in the recollection of many of our readers, that their mother, the late Countess, was one of the greatest beauties of her day; the trial of Captain ——, for *crim. con.* with her Ladyship, in which many curious facts came out, is, it is said, about to be republished.’

“Now, is not this perfectly odious? Then comes a list of your fashionable friends, Miss Mildmay.

‘Mr. Sydenham, of Newmarket celebrity, is now entertaining a distinguished party of turf fashionables, at his seat, Elsinore Lodge, near the city of H——. Among others, Viscount Dorville, Lords Mordaunt, Hazlemere, and G. Fitzallan; the whole party will adjourn to town after the Easter holidays.’

“ Very interesting intelligence for the public, truly !—Then ‘ We are inexpressibly concerned to learn that the much-respected Marquis of Allandale has received very alarming accounts of the health of his son, the celebrated Lord Killarney. This distinguished traveller is, we understand, confined to his bed at Paris with a violent fever. He is most tenderly nursed by a beautiful and interesting Italian lady, the companion of his dangers and exploits; a lovely child, a daughter, is said to be the pledge of their long and mutual attachment.’ ”

“ Lord Killarney, you know,” said Madame de Wallestein to the Baron, “ is the elder brother of Lord George Fitzallan, who used to be so much with us in *La rue Royale*, Louisa’s great friend.”

“ I did not know it, indeed,” said the Baron; “ I never shall understand about the English titles, the degrees of your *noblesse*; *c’est très embarrassant pour un étranger*. But I remember

Lord George Fitzallan very well ; a very fine young man, who waltzed very often with Miss Mildmay."

" To think now of his remembering that ! said the Baroness, turning to her friend. " But come, my dear Louisa, you have not yet seen Miss Birmingham's painting ; come and examine the picture with me."

" Perhaps," whispered Louisa, as they passed through the anteroom, which led to the grand saloon, " this illness of Lord Killarney's is the cause of Lord George's change of sentiments."

" *Oh, non ! non !*" said Madame de Wallestein, " I will not think so hardly of him. From what you told me yesterday, he lamented his want of fortune ; now, you know, if he were calculating upon his brother's death, that would not be the case any longer. Oh ! I dare say this story of the illness is all a fabrication, a mere Morning Post invention, for want of news to fill up the columns of the paper. But, now

see, here is the place which Lionel recommends, on this side the chimney-piece. Is not it a beautiful portrait? so striking a likeness!"

"Charming, indeed!" said Louisa, moving backwards so as to catch the proper light; "but whom have we here? Oh! it is Colonel Montague, just come at the right time."

Lionel paid his compliments to the two ladies, and was well pleased at finding them thus engaged. "Yes, that is the light, my dearest Caroline: Oh! it looks beautiful just there, so very like my lamented mother!"

"What a lovely woman she was!" said Louisa, during the pause which ensued, for both were much affected.

"We shall never see her like again," said the Baroness with a sigh and a voice tremulous from emotion. "So sweet a countenance, so fine a manner, and a temper that was really quite perfect."

"Yes!" said Lionel, "and do not forget her strong sense, and real unaffected piety, united

to so much gentleness and forbearance. Had it but pleased Heaven to have spared her, my poor father would have escaped most of those miseries which eventually overpowered him. How inscrutable are the decrees of Providence ! When I bade her adieu, on leaving Atherford Abbey, to join the Guards, how little did I dream that I should never see her again ! Do you remember, Caroline, when she followed me to the hall-door ? she pressed my hand after I had mounted my horse, but she did not shed a single tear ; she wished to keep up my poor father's spirits. She had such power over her feelings, such real self-command."

" And yet," said the Baroness, " even then my poor mother knew her situation, for I have often heard her say at that time that her lungs were affected, and that she should not recover. But she never would let my father be informed ; she always dreaded the effect it might have upon him. How exactly that portrait gives the general air of her head ; but her smile,

and the expression of her eyes, no painting can ever give that! Edmund is most like her, at least he was. You, Lionel, are every inch a Montague;" and the Baroness looked alternately at her brother and at the picture.

"What do we not owe to Miss Birmingham!" said Lionel. "I am all impatience to thank her for this delightful present. Are you for walking there this morning? it is such a step to Regent-street."

The two ladies professed their willingness to go immediately, and left the room to prepare. When Madame de Wallestein returned, she found M. de Rosenthal looking over Louisa's music-book; the Baron and Lionel were in deep conversation at the window.

"Ah! j'espère que nous aurons de la musique ce soir, Madame: Mademoiselle Louise chante si bien, comme elle est jolie, tant de grace et d'esprit; oh, elle est vraiment séduisante!"

"C'est bien vrai cela," said the Baroness; "a sweet creature she is in every respect; but she

is not in force at present, *pauvre petite! c'est le cœur qui a parlé.*" And Madame de Wallestein, by way of explanation, patted the spot where her own heart was situated, *à plusieurs reprises.* "Affairs of the heart are very terrible things to us women; I think we should do better without any for my part."

"*Oh, Madame, quel mot cruel! que deviendrait donc les hommes si les femmes étaient sans cœur?*"

"Why, we should be more upon a level, for certainly you men generally act as if the heart was wholly forgotten in your composition."

"*Ah! je voudrais pour moi que cela fut vrai,*" said Alphonse, with a look which he meant to be touching, *à l'extrême; "le cœur m'a trop fait souffrir, c'est que je suis né si sensible: mais les femmes, les femmes——"*

He was interrupted very suddenly by Louisa appearing at the door, and he changed the conversation with the utmost facility to admiration of her bonnet and pelisse. In a few minutes, Colonel Montague and the two ladies departed

for their walk, and the Baron de Wallestein disturbed the pensive meditations of the young Count de Rosenval, by requiring him to copy immediately four large folio sheets of very close crabbed writing, a memorial which had just been brought to the office by the Austrian consul, and it was to go off with other despatches by the bag in less than four hours; but it was necessary that a copy of it should remain with the embassy. Poor Alphonse! it was very hard, the sun shone so bright; Hyde Park was sure to be crowded and gay, and he was to have mounted for the first time upon his new purchase, *un joli petit cheval, couleur Isabelle*. He had expected to be even more admired than the Prince Alfred de Steinberg: in short, he had meant fully to have created an effect in the eyes of certain fair ladies.

“ *Et pourquoi non?*” said he, casting a farewell glance at himself in an opposite mirror.

“ *M. de Rosenval, dépêchez-vous donc; ou*

vous n'aurez jamais fini à temps," said the Baron, with authority.

"*Monsieur, je vole,*" said the reluctant secretary, as he mended his pen, and muttered to himself: "*Quelle vie que celle d'un secrétaire! j'aurais mieux fait dans le service. Mais alors —il y a toujours les arrêts: et les arrêts, c'est le Diable.*"

CHAPTER XII.

INTRODUCTIONS AND PRELIMINARIES.

“ In town what numbers into fame advance,
Conscious of merit in the coxcombs' dance ;
The Op'ra, Almack's, park, assembly, play,
Those dear destroyers of the tedious day ;
That wheel of fops, that saunter of the town,
Call it diversion, and the pill goes down.”

YOUNG.

“ Who is that gentleman endeavouring to catch your eye, Madame de Wallestein ?” said Louisa, just as they had crossed Oxford Street.

“ Where ?” said the Baroness, putting up her glass ; “ *Mon Dieu, mais c'est* Lord Hare ! Oh, he is crossing over to speak to me. Who would have expected him in town before Easter ? He was one of my great beaux at Brighton !

He is son to Lady Bellamont, who is one of the Ladies Patronesses of Almack's. They call him the Mosaic Dandy, on account of his Jewish complexion.—*Ha! bon jour, milord,*” and she held out her hand to him, quite à l'Anglaise.

“Madame de Wallestein, I declare! by all that's good!” said the beau, with an affected lisp. “Upon my honour, I had no idea I should find a living soul in town I knew. I thought you were at Brighton still. Need not ask after your health at least, for you are looking charmingly; and the Baron, how is he?”

“Oh! à merveille je vous remercie. Give me leave to present my brother, Colonel Montague, to you, Lord Hare.”

“Delighted to have that honour;” and the two young men bowed.

“I suppose there is nothing going on now,” said the Baroness; “no *réunions* this week.”

“Faith, no! every soul is running out of town to get a breathing, that they may work double tides after Easter. I am so surprised

to hear that Lady Hauton is arrived ! But she has all the Almack's affairs to arrange ; such confusion, by all accounts ! I don't envy her ladyship. However, there is to be no ball till Wednesday se'nnight, so she will have time to reform all abuses."

" The last ball was not a good one, was it ?"

" Oh, detestable ! I really believe all the charity people got in : you never saw such a set in your life. All the old gowns of the last season, these horrid red silks that were worn in the dog days last year, made their re-appearance. The Lady Beaulieus, and their chaperon, that fat Miss Bevil, and Lady Emma Sedley, and Lady Margaret, and the Miss Carltons, were all in *ponceau* gowns : Colonel Leach, in his funny way, was proposing that there should be a charity ball, to buy the ladies new dresses, and an auction the next morning to sell off the old ones ; and, only think ! Lady Lochaber wanted to introduce country dances and reels ! so

horridly Scotch ! But my mother made a stand against it. They say Lady Hauton means to have *écarté* for the chaperons, and those men who can't or won't dance."

"Has Lady Margaret Carlton been long in town?" enquired Louisa.

"Really, I can't say; though she is my cousin: but of course she's come to meet the Duke of Clanalpin: I don't know how she would get on without him, poor woman! Unfortunately, however, he is not getting on quite as fast as she could wish; for, I understand, he is snowed up on his road from Mac-Ivor Tower, somewhere between Inverness and Edinburgh; only not knowing the exact *carte du pays*, I can't tell you whereabouts."

"And is the Archdeacon come too, my lord?"

"Oh, to be sure! for there's a bishop dead. Hang it! I can't just recollect the name, but you'll all know whom I mean when I say it's the Bible Dandy. Of course the Archdeacon is on

the look-out ; expects something good, perhaps : and so he means to go to the levee next week, if the gout will but be merciful to him."

" This is the house, I believe ?" said Colonel Montague ; pointing to a large stone mansion, with a very heavy colonnade, and a massive stone balcony, supported by huge caryatides.

" This is the Birmingham Warehouse, you know, I suppose ?" said Lord Hare. " Certainly the very triumph of bad taste. Are you going to call on this Birmingham lady ?"

" Yes," said the Baroness ; " are you acquainted with her ?"

" No, indeed ! but I hope to be before she begins her gaieties. Her balls, they say, are to be the thing this season. It is supposed Lady Hauton will ask the company, and so get her a *ton* acquaintance : and then the daughter is to be such a monstrous catch ! Oh ! all the world will be at her feet, so I must move heaven and earth to get there. But I see she is at home,

so I will take my leave: Madame de Wallestein, adieu !”

The spacious hall was filled with footmen in flaming liveries, and the names of the Baroness de Wallestein, Miss Louisa Mildmay, and Colonel Montague, were passed on from one to another, till at last a most accomplished man of figure, who filled the ostentatious office of groom of the chambers, relieved the more sedate man of parts whose business it was to keep the visiting records, and with an air of the most supreme *bon ton*, ushered the party into the morning drawing-room, where, on a very magnificent sofa, which she well filled, sat in all the pride of pomp and consequence, the portly Lady Birmingham. Her morning attire was rich in the extreme; her watch chain, her bracelets, her rings, were all outrageously fine and massive. The table was covered with notes and cards: her ladyship was writing, but laying down her pen, the stick of which was of ivory

inlaid with precious stones; she pushed from her a most superb gold inkstand richly chased, as well as a splendidly gilt russia blotting-book, and then advanced to meet her visitors.

Louisa took her ladyship's graciously offered hand, and then begged leave to present the Baroness de Wallestein to her.

Lady Birmingham was enchanted to see them; she was beginning to fear they might have been prevented coming; but indeed they were just at the right time, for she expected Miss Birmingham and Miss Mildmay home every moment for their morning's walk.

"Colonel Montague, I am most happy to find you are come to town. I think you have not left your card."

Lionel was somewhat surprised.

"I was just going to write you an invitation to dinner, and my porter was telling me he was certain you were not down in the visiting-book. Are you engaged for Saturday next? You will meet Lord Beaulieu and his

beautiful daughters, and several members of either house. Should the Duke of Clanalpin arrive in time, he also will find a card upon his table. I have asked his grace, on purpose that he may meet the Carltons. Charming woman, Lady Margaret! our best neighbours at the Abbey. Colonel Montague, I must recommend the Miss Carltons to your notice: very agreeable girls, highly accomplished."

Louisa could not help recalling to mind all that she had heard Lady Margaret say against Lady Birmingham.

Lionel bowed, and accepted the invitation.

"And how is Julia?" enquired Louisa, "and Barbara too? I hope they will come in soon. I trust we shall see them."

"They cannot be much longer," said Lady Birmingham; "for I charged Barbara to be at home before one, and she was to minute Mr. Duval the dentist: they were to call there that he might inspect her teeth; because, as she is to be presented next week, I wished

them to be in perfect order. Mr. Duval is the only dentist of whom I have any opinion, and, as he is going off to attend the Elector of Hesse to-morrow, he will have no time to lose. But it may be as well to desire the groom of the chambers will not fail to inform me when the young ladies come in."

Lady Birmingham rang the bell with energy.

It was answered by the same man of figure as before.

"Moneypenny, is Miss Birmingham returned from her walk?"

"I believe not, my lady," was the reply.

"Did my daughter take her own footman, or my second footman?"

"I heard Miss Birmingham tell her own man Peter to get his hat, my lady; so I suppose she took him."

"Then tell my second footman to come here directly."

“ Yes, my lady. Does your ladyship wish to be let know when the young ladies come in?” said Money Penny.

“ That’s not your business ; I only want you to send Charles, the second footman, to me.”

The second footman appeared forthwith, and the visitors felt curious to know how the mystery would end.

“ Charles ! When Miss Birmingham and Miss Mildmay return from their walk, inform them that the Baroness de Wallestein and Miss Louisa Mildmay are in the morning drawing-room, waiting to see them. Desire the porter will not fail to procure one of Colonel Montague’s visiting-tickets, as he passes through the hall, and enquire if Peter has sent the last parcel of dinner-cards.”

“ I have just delivered them, my lady.”

“ Oh, very well ! that is all, you may go. But say that I shall want the barouche-landau, with four horses, to drive as far as Lee’s and

Kennedy's at half-past two o'clock, the second coachman may go with us, but I will have the head postilion."

"Very well, my lady!" said Charles, and withdrew immediately.

"I beg your pardon," said Lady Birmingham, at last addressing her guests; "but, in so large an establishment as mine, I find that it is absolutely necessary to keep each attendant in his particular sphere. In England, I believe, we have many more servants than people have on the Continent, Madame de Wallestein. I dare say you will be surprised to hear that I have six footmen in full employment. I hope you will find your card of invitation on your table when you get home, for dinner on Saturday. Miss Louisa, I ordered a separate card to be sent to you. I always have my dinner invitations sent out before twelve o'clock; and the porter, who is answerable for them, brings me in the list when delivered, which I sign, and

that clears him from any blame. I shall be happy to introduce you all to the Duke of Clan-alpin, a most agreeable man !”

“ Are you engaged on Saturday, Caroline ?” said Colonel Montague to his sister.

“ *Pas que je sache,*” said the Baroness ; “ we shall be happy, I am sure, to wait on Lady Birmingham. But perhaps I had better not answer too positively, till I have seen the Baron.”

“ Then you will have the goodness to let me know as soon as you can. We had meant to have asked the Glenmores ; but I find they do not come till next week. The poor little soul can know so few people in London, that I think it will really be a positive duty to take her up.”

Louisa could have smiled at the thought of what Lady Mary Derwent would have said to this speech, but the door suddenly opened. “ Here they are, I declare !” said she, throwing herself into Julia’s arms. “ My dearest sister,

how charmed I am to see you look so well ; and you too, Barbara ; why, I protest you are neither of you yet grown thin or pale !”

“ We were so afraid we should have missed you,” said Julia ; “ for Mr. Duval was so slow in his operations, that Barbara and I have almost run the whole way home. Ha ! Colonel Montague, how do you do ? and that, I feel certain, must be Madame de Wallestein, from her likeness to you. My dearest Caroline ! what a pleasure it is to see you once again in England !”

“ I should have known you any where, Julia,” said the Baroness, embracing her. “ Though it is now seven years since we met, yet I do not think you at all altered, except that you have rather less colour than you used to have formerly, and somewhat more *embonpoint*.”

“ How time flies, to be sure !” said Miss Mildmay, looking at the Baroness affectionately. “ When I look back a few years, and recall to my mind my little pupil Caroline,—my favourite

child, as I used to call her,—running races with Louisa on the terrace at Atherford, in her white frock and muslin bonnet, so full of fun and frolic, I hardly can recognize her again in the fashionable French lady I see before me. Ah, Caroline ! were my dear father but with us now, how delighted he would be with his little god-daughter ! You know he used to boast that you would be the beauty of the county, when you were grown up, though he might not live to see you. Caroline Montague was always his favourite toast—‘ The rose of Atherford.’ ”

“ Oh ! dear Mr. Mildmay ! I always loved him so much ! how I do long to see him again, to assure him I have not forgotten all his kindness to me, and those happy days so long ago, when I used to be with you all at dear old Bishop’s-Court. I should not like to go there now,” said the Baroness ; “ it would recall so much to my mind—all that I have lost ;” and her eyes filled with tears. Then recovering herself she added, “ And your brother too ? Louisa tells

me he is grown grave and grey ; quite the sage Godfrey, as we always called him. What a saucy girl I was then ! but you all spoilt me, and tolerated my impertinence. *Mais à présent c'est tout-à-fait autre chose ; vous me trouverez bien changée maintenant, devenue mère de famille très respectable.* I long to show you my children, and to introduce the Baron to you : I am sure he is just a person to suit your taste, Julia ; and you will wonder that such a giddy thing as I was, could ever have hit the fancy of such a grave reasonable person. However, you know, it is said contrasts always do the best. *Mais ma chère amie, de grâce* present me to Miss Birmingham ; she looks so good and amiable that I long to be acquainted with her."

While this conversation had been going on, Lady Birmingham, to whom all sentiment was unknown, anxious to lose no more time, had resumed her pen, and was continuing the letter which she had been engaged in writing when her visitors came in. Louisa had, cleverly

enough, drawn Miss Birmingham and Colonel Montague into a recess near the window, where they all three stood together, very comfortably concealed from general view by the thick folds of a splendid Genoa velvet curtain. Louisa had nothing to do but to listen, for the other two had much to say to each other, and yet a certain consciousness possessed them both, which prevented either from expressing what each was thinking of.

At length the Baroness and Julia crossed the room to join them, and then Lionel exerted himself to say, "Caroline, I am sure you are anxious to have some conversation with Miss Birmingham, that you may thank her for the very beautiful picture which I have just been admiring in Portland Place."

"My dear Miss Birmingham," said the Baroness in her kindest manner, "how shall I find words to express my obligation? you could not have bestowed any thing on me half so valuable. But that you should have employed so much

time and trouble to gratify one who is a perfect stranger to you, but by report, is most flattering to my vanity, as you can only have felt interested about me from the too partial representation of these my kind friends ;” looking at Julia and Louisa.

“ May I hope then,” said Barbara timidly, “ that this picture will prove but an introduction to a better acquaintance? I have felt so interested about you and yours, my dear Madam, ever since we have lived at Atherford Abbey, that I cannot tell you how often and how anxiously I have wished to know you ; and I do trust, that now, when we have these two sisters,” smiling, as she spoke, at the Miss Mildmays, “ for our links, we may become very intimate, and see a great deal of each other. I am sure I wish it from my heart ;” and she held out her hand.

“ And I, from my heart,” said the Baroness, “ can assure you that I feel certain I shall love you. Indeed, I do already.”

Lionel had stood by, contemplating in silence the graceful timidity of Barbara's manner. He was charmed with the feeling expressed in her countenance ; her look said more than any words could do. He now came forward : " I seem to be quite forgotten in this friendly compact," said he ; " but I shall not let it pass ; for Miss Birmingham must accept of my thanks also, which are quite as sincere as Caroline's, though I may not be able to express them in such elegant language. But that picture is a gift which we can neither of us ever value enough. Thus let me then thank you for it ;" and he caught her hand from the Baroness, and pressed it to his lips.

Madame de Wallestein and Louisa were too well used to foreign manners to be at all surprised by this sudden piece of gallantry ; and Miss Mildmay, in order to relieve the momentary embarrassment which it occasioned, said to Louisa, " You seem to have had a pleasant visit at Norbury ; your letters were a great amusement to us."

Colonel Montague then named the two families of Derwent and Glenmore, about both of whom the Baroness and Barbara were much interested. The latter, in particular, was anxious to hear all about her old friends, the good and charitable Duchess of Derwent, and that amiable Lady Mary ; they had always been so good to the Selwyns. Then Lord and Lady Glenmore came on the tapis ; Louisa had to describe them both.

The Baroness thought it was “ *un très beau mariage* ” for little Miss Danvers ; and Lionel looked grave when she hinted, that most probably, before many years were over, her ladyship would be a dashing widow, and might then look about for *une inclination de cœur*.

Miss Birmingham, in her gentle tone, expressed her hopes that Lady Glenmore might have a son ; it would be so delightful to complete the old Marquis's happiness. How anxious she must suppose her to be about it !

“ I dare say she votes it all a sad bore,” said

Madame de Wallestein, laughing. "Do you remember, Louisa, the Chevalier de la Tour's compliment to me, just before my little Ulrica was born—" *C'est un chien de métier que le votre, Madame. Les femmes sont bien à plaindre.* I am sure I agree with him."

Lionel looked displeased, as he always did when his sister sported foreign; Julia was surprised; Barbara turned her eyes on the ground; while Louisa could not help smiling, she was so much amused by the evident discomposure of the party. "So thoroughly English!" thought she to herself.

Lady Birmingham now requested Colonel Montague to give her a frank, for Sir Benjamin had taken a ride into the country, and might not be back in time. When this service was performed, he was invited, in return, to share the sofa with her ladyship; and he had to listen to a long history about her opera box, and that tiresome Ebers! who had intended to disappoint her of the box she had fixed her mind upon.

She knew that the Duchess of Stavordale had got hold of him, but a golden key can do any thing ; so Lady Birmingham had bribed Ebers, and had succeeded in obtaining her favourite place, the centre of the first tier ; and then she had let it till Easter to the very Duchess herself ; and she had actually made her pay double, by way of revenge, because her grace had refused to have Lady Birmingham introduced to her. “ I pique myself on doing impossibilities,” said her ladyship ; “ and I dare say I shall soon have the Duchess intreating to be presented to me, and then it will be my turn to be high.”

Lionel had had enough of such conversation, and was meditating how to effect his escape ; but it was impossible, for Lady Birmingham had next got to Almack's. Never was there any thing that required such interest as to get a subscription after Easter. The Ladies Patronesses were higher than ever ; it was now quite the exclusive set : for which reason she was so

anxious to have Barbara there ; and she flattered herself she should succeed at last, for she had a very particular friend who was the intimate of Lady Hauton, and through her she had strong hopes. Mrs. Bucannon could do any thing with Lady Hauton, and her ladyship could do every thing at Almack's ; “ and she was to come to town yesterday,” said Lady Birmingham ; “ so you may suppose how nervous I am.”

Madame de Wallestein at length relieved Lionel, by calling out, “ My dear brother, Louisa is going to look at Miss Birmingham's paintings ; I am sure you, who are so fond of the arts, will like to go, *et moi, qui ne m'y connais pas du tout*, I will sit with Lady Birmingham, if she will allow me.”

Colonel Montague waited not for her ladyship's sanction ; he was off directly. “ Barbara certainly does paint beautifully,” said the mother : “ and so indeed she ought to do, considering the very expensive masters I have given her.

She is now attended by the famous Mr. Zink ; he has two guineas for every hour and a half. She is copying with him some first-rate pictures, which have been kindly lent her. If Colonel Montague is an amateur, he will probably know them. A fine sea-piece by Carlo Dolce, and a copy of a Holy Family by Vandervelde."

The Baroness, with great gravity, doubted whether her brother knew those pictures, though he had quite a passion for painting.

"That sort of thing does seem so much the fashion now-a-days among the young men, that one really is obliged to talk a little about it, to learn a few of those strange names. Really, Madame de Wallestein, your brother seems a charming person. I was quite delighted when he popped so nicely into our borough, though unluckily I had promised to support another very deserving young *protégé* of mine. Of course he will now have often to visit his constituents at Merton ; so I trust he will make Atherford Abbey his home, as it ought to be,

indeed. I hope you will also consider it in the same light, whenever you visit H——shire."

The Baroness bowed with an air of *hauteur*.

Just then the door was suddenly thrown open, and the important Moneypenny ushered in two ladies, whom he announced as Mrs. Buccannon and Miss Leslie. The one was a stout flourishing-looking woman, with an air of great activity, and a sharp, shrewd, grey eye, with which she seemed to see into every thing and every body. The other was a long, thin, forlorn-looking Miss, of what is called a certain age, the most uncertain of all possible periods.

"This is delightful!" said Lady Birmingham, starting up in ecstasy to receive her friends. "What hopes! my dear Mrs. Buccannon?"

"Every thing going on just as we could wish, both about Almack's and the canal; it is all *en train*. Lady Hauton is arrived, and I

have seen Miss Bevil, so she will know to-night. But nothing will, of course, be settled till after the committee on Monday. And about the canal I have exerted myself famously. Look at this basket, my dear Lady Birmingham ; only think ! I have just left all the notes with the Duchess of Stavordale : it was quite full, for Jane has been writing, in my name, to all the Scotch members, to beg they will vote against the bill. Lady Hauton has also been canvassing right and left about it ; and Miss Bevil says that her ladyship means to drive down to the House of Commons the day it comes on, to pounce on the members before they go in. The Duke of Stavordale declares, they say, it will be quite Lady Hauton's House of Commons on Thursday. Then you see, my dear Lady Birmingham, if we carry it, what a claim you will have on her ladyship for a subscription to Almack's : she cannot possibly refuse you. Besides, there will be Sir Benjamin's vote

to hang out *in terrorem*. I have done some service certainly ; and all I shall ask in return will be a subscription for you and Miss Birmingham."

" But where is Miss Birmingham ? I hope she is quite well this morning ?" said Miss Leslie in a plaintive tone.

" Oh ! she will be here presently," said Lady Birmingham ; " she is showing her paintings to some very particular friends."

" We cannot wait to see her, I am afraid," said the fussy Mrs. Bucannon.

" But we have a great deal to tell you about Almack's," said Miss Leslie.

" Yes !" said Mrs. Bucannon, " they say positively Lady Lochaber is turned out ; so every body is on tip-toe to know who will be the new patroness. Some think Lady Hutton will carry it all her own way ; others say Lady Bellamont will oppose her, and that they will have a tug for it. I can't say I am sorry

for Lady Lochaber, she used poor Jane so abominably ill last winter."

"What did she do?" enquired Lady Birmingham.

"Oh! it's a long story, and I have not time for it to-day; but I must tell you a thought that struck me just now. Had not you better write to Lady Lochaber about Almack's, as if you knew nothing about her being out? Perhaps her petitions may be made over to her successor; there is no telling: so it would certainly be as well, I think." Then turning to the Baroness, "I must really apologize for taking up so much of Lady Birmingham's attention; but Almack's is such an important concern to us all just now."

The Baroness bowed, and the lady continued.

"I think, when you write to Lady Hauton, you might as well just mention that you are bringing out your daughter; say nothing more, no description, they will easily find out all

about Miss Birmingham's prospects and pretensions; and Jane and I will be on the alert to raise public curiosity about her."

"I may as well mention," said Lady Birmingham, "that I mean to give many gay things this spring."

"No, no! Jane and I will whisper that about everywhere, as a great secret. But, indeed, no one can look at Birmingham House without supposing that of course. We may tell Gunter and Collinet that you are only waiting to fix your night; and a hint to the newspapers might be of use, I mean to the Morning Post."

"And have you heard any thing about the French play?"

"Oh! nothing certain. It seems the ladies paid so ill last year, that Perlet positively refuses to come over, unless the patronesses will be responsible for the money; and this they refuse. It is said that they let in all the young men gratis. I hear the diplomats are all in

despair about it; for, to be sure, it was the only amusement those poor foreigners had. Certainly it was a most capital flirting-place. Do you know, the saints say that all the *crim. cons.* of last year began there?"

"Oh, fie!" said Lady Birmingham, pursing her mouth into a sort of smile; "and yet you wish for my Barbara to go there. What will Madame de Wallestein think of you, my dear Mrs. Bucannon?"

The name of Wallestein seemed to operate as a charm on the quick ears of the busy lady. She turned sharply round, and eyed the Baroness with great attention. She had sat till now in the corner of the sofa, apparently occupied in looking over a new review, but really very much amused in attending to all that had been said. She now rose, and observed, that as it was getting late, she would go into the next room, to summon her brother and Louisa, as it was quite time for them to be returning home.

“ Am I mistaken ?” said Mrs. Bucannon, advancing nearer to Lady Birmingham. “ Did you say that lady’s name was Wallestein ? has she any thing to do with the new Austrian ambassadress ?”

“ It is the ambassadress herself,” said Lady Birmingham, very consequentially. “ She came early this morning, on purpose to be introduced to me. There is a kind of connexion between us, from our renting her brother Sir Edmund Montague’s place, which will of course lead to a considerable intimacy.”

“ Indeed ! my dear madam, that may prove a most fortunate circumstance for your ladyship and Miss Birmingham. I hear this lady is to be hand and glove with all your tip-top grantees : she has been quite the rage at Brighton ; every night at the Pavilion ; brought over all the French fashions. You know, Jane, those caps that are called Wallesteins are her introduction. Miss Bevil was giving me hints about Lady Hauton meaning to take her up, yester-

day. Not that I mind what Miss Bevil says either, for she is always pretending to know so much more than other people; but I dare say what she said then was true enough—that Lady Hauton always makes up to some ambassadress or other, that she may have things over from Paris in their bag. Mighty convenient indeed! and those great ladies will have an eye to their own interest, we all know. A striking-looking woman, certainly, this Baroness. I thought it was a new face. I was puzzling who it could be. Very handsome! don't you think her, Jane?"

"Pretty well!" replied Miss Leslie, coldly; "good eyes, and a foreign air, that's all that struck me. Not to compare with Miss Birmingham."

"Oh! my dear Miss Leslie," said Lady Birmingham; "you are so kindly partial! But I must not have you flatter my Barbara so! though the Duke of N—— did say the other morning,

that he thought her one of the finest girls in London."

While this conversation had been going on in the morning drawing-room, the Baroness had joined the party in Miss Birmingham's little *boudoir*. Louisa and Julia she found in deep conversation at the window, while Lionel and Barbara were very busily employed at the other end of the room, in examining the contents of a large portfolio. One of the sketches led to a narrative; he had been reminded by it of some interesting anecdote. Madame de Wallestein sat where she could watch the expression of each face, though her brother spoke so low that she heard little of what he told, only it was something that had happened in his campaigns; and as he proceeded in his description, Barbara seemed to forget herself, for she gradually raised her long black eyelashes, and, when they came to the catastrophe, her dark-blue eyes were fixed on Lionel with such intensity of feeling,

that the Baroness thought she could have gazed at her for ever.

Ah ! who can deny but that the happiest moment of a woman's existence is, when her fond heart thus beats high with the conscious feeling of having discovered a corresponding sentiment in the breast of that being whom fancy, in her secret dreams, has bade her prefer to all the world ?

“ L'Imagination gouverne l'Univers,”

said that emperor of charlatans, Buonaparte ; and he said right. What is love and all its attendant feelings, but imagination ? and they who would make marriage, as it is in France, a civil contract, and an *affaire de convenance*, deprive youth of its greatest happiness—the power of dressing up life in the colours of romance. But they would destroy all this fairy frost-work ; they would tear down the silver veil which sheds a brilliant radiance over the future ; they would allow sentiment to see nothing before her

save the sober realities of life ! But Nature will not thus be triumphed over ; and if Imagination be not allowed her right to adorn the shrine of Hymen, she will not forget to exercise her power over the mind in working woe instead of weal.

That woman is little to be envied, who does not imagine the man who is leading her to the altar to be a perfect being, the only true representative of the *beau idéal* (in the moral sense I mean) whom she has yet met with. Do not laugh at the happily mistaken victim : the charm will cease soon enough ; but the choice will be made, the destiny will be cast, and fortunately, in most cases, necessity or habit will fill up the void which Imagination leaves, when Truth dispels her sweet illusions.

“ It were a thousand pities to disturb them,” thought the Baroness ; “ they seem so happy ! ” She advanced therefore towards the two sisters, taking care to turn her back to the lovers.

“ Other people can flirt as well as me, I

perceive," said Louisa with a saucy smile. "Who would have thought the solemn Lionel could prove himself *si dévoué*? And you too, Julia! oh! you are an admirable *chaperon*; I do not wonder Barbara is so fond of you. Caroline could not carry a thing off better. Now do you know," turning to the Baroness, "she has kept me all this time fast in this corner here, talking to me about the school at Bishop's Court, and Aunt Pen's rheumatism, and flannel petticoats."

"Nay!" said Julia; "I am sure you have been telling me every thing about Norbury, and every body there, except the individual I wanted to hear about. But how those two are talking to each other! I hope Lady Birmingham will not come here just at present."

"Oh! *il n'y a point de danger heureusement*," said Madame de Wallestein; "she has got company, two ladies, a Mrs. Bucannon and a Miss Leslie. Pray who are they?"

“Two very tiresome women, I think,” said Miss Mildmay. “They are an aunt and niece who live very near us in Conduit-street; and unfortunately we see a great deal too much of them, for they are prodigious pedestrians, and immoderately fond of gossip: I believe, in the world they are called Fetch and Carry, for they do jobs for half the town. The young men say they depend upon them for their daily bread, as they procure invitations for every body. They go from one lady patroness to another about admissions and rejections, they negotiate introductions, they bargain about Opera-boxes, they patronize all sorts of public performers, and get off tickets for them: in short, they are general agents in affairs of amusement, and transact all the underhand business for the lady patronesses, and the fashionable world in general. Oh! you have no idea what busy, important personages these ladies are: and unfortunately they have got hold

of Lady Birmingham, and are urging her on to many enterprises of moment and difficulty. But Barbara and I always keep out of their way."

"*De veritables intrigantes, ces chères dames!*" said the Baroness. "Well, when I give a party, I shall find them most useful creatures, to run on errands, and take messages *de part et d'autre*, so let me have another peep at them: and then, Louisa, we really must be going, for the Baron will think me lost."

The Baroness now paid her parting compliments to Lady Birmingham, and shook hands most kindly with Barbara; Louisa embraced her sister, and her friend; Lionel bowed to all the party: but Miss Birmingham was particularly silent all the rest of the day. As Julia observed, she did not even overhear Mrs. Bucannon say to Lady Birmingham, "Upon my word, a very fine-looking man! quite a distinguished air! a thorough guardsman, my dear Ma'am; and after all there is nothing like them. I always say to Jane, if I had to choose either

a partner for a dance or for life, it should be a guardsman. Indeed, I always used to say so, even just after I married my poor dear Admiral."

"How well your sister Julia looks!" said the Baroness to her friend afterwards; "*mais elle manque de tournure, elle se met mal*, she seems determined to be quite an old maid. Lady Birmingham, to be sure, is odious; wealth and pomposity run mad: with her fourth footman, and her third carriage, and her second postilion, perfectly ludicrous, *C'est une comédie*. But as for her daughter Barbara,—oh! she is an angel. Had that girl been brought up in France, what an effect she might have produced!"

"She is a charming girl," said Louisa; "and you will like Julia too, when you know her better."

"Oh! I do like her already; she seems so good, and amiable as well as *aimable*: a sort of person who steals into your heart. A dangerous girl now in a country house; for she has what some *d'un age solide* rave about—*un heurenx*

caractère. She would do so well for a widower with a house full of children; or for some old bachelor about fifty, who begins to find his life dull. There's my poor old friend Count Schweirg, she would do now for him exactly: or Baron Wohtzemath,—I really have half a mind to write to him; she would not mind his six children and his grey mustachios, I dare say; and he is quite miserable in his old chateau. But, my dear Lousia, we must find out if there is any truth about Lord George being gone to Paris to nurse his sick brother; it will not do for you to wait another season, till he has become a marquis; and then perhaps he may change his mind. If he does not soon propose decidedly, I shall look about for some other *parti* for you. What a number of admirers you had in France! it was only the *argent comptant* that was wanting. There was that colonel in the *Grenadiers à Cheval*, he might have done; as he was aide-de-camp to the poor Duc de Berri, you would have been in the

court set immediately, possibly named to some place about the Duchess;—or, being English, perhaps Madame would have been more likely to take you up, therefore your husband might have become aide-de-camp to the Duc d'Angoulême;—yes, that would have done exactly. *Le Marquis de Bassieres*, a very old family: nothing to do with the general of that name."

Louisa could not help laughing at these Alnacasserien projects.

The Baroness continued her arrangements thus:—"Before you decide finally, my love, think of our little *protégé*, Alphonse de Roserval. In Paris he is such a favourite, he is called Cupidon. Then he will be very rich; his father left him a beautiful chateau, and such fine vineyards! on the banks of the Rhine. His mother was a special favourite too, with Prince Metternich, when she lived in Germany, and that, you know, is the road to power at Vienna. The old Baron, his uncle, wrote Wallestein word

to send Alphonse back *avec une bonne et belle femme Anglaise, et quelques jolies juments*. But promise me, Louisa, that you will tell me *quand le cœur aura parlé*."

The young lady declared positively, that her heart was not likely to speak for any one.

"Ah! *bah! ne vas pas être prude, je t'en conjure*. But here comes Lionel. Not a word more about love, for your life. We must all be prudent and silent."

"I met Lord Hazlemere in the Park, Louisa," said Colonel Montague, at dinner. "He is just arrived from Elsinore Lodge. The Sydenhams are to be in town early next week, I suppose in time for Almack's; Lord and Lady Glenmore are to set off on Sunday-afternoon, that they may travel slowly, and arrive on Tuesday evening; her ladyship has set her mind on attending the ball on Wednesday, and Hazlemere was going to Lady Hauton, to beg that the tickets might be on the table in St.

James's-square, to greet her when she arrived. He agreed with me, that she is not in a fit state to encounter such a crowd. It will be running some risk in her situation, particularly after the inevitable fatigue of so long a journey, but the Marquis cannot refuse her."

"Poor little thing!" said Louisa, plaintively.

"Oh, I have no patience with her!" said Lionel. "So very childish!"

"But after all, she is but a child, you must allow, in age, as well as ideas."

"In France," said the Baroness, "you know, they generally marry as young, or younger; but then there is always a convenient *belle mère*, or some other elderly matron, to inspect the proceedings of *la jeune mariée*. She never goes into public alone; that would be considered *affreux*. Their system accumulates safeguards around a pretty youthful bride."

"And it is a system which seems to answer so well," said her brother, drily. "I would rather,

however, that my wife's morals should be in her own keeping, than in that of any of her kind and exemplary friends."

"Oh ! but your wife," said Madame de Waldestein, "will be out of all rule, of course, *une personne unique*."

"Is Lord Mordaunt in town ?" said Louisa, longing to ask after somebody else.

"No. He, Lord Dorville, and Lord George are still with the Sydenhams. Hazlemere seemed to think that it must depend upon the next accounts from Lord Killarney, whether or not Lord George will have to go over to Paris."

"Indeed !" said the young lady with a long-drawn sigh, accompanied by what the French call, *un battement de cœur*.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LADY PATRONESS.

“ I'll thus address the Pow'r; ‘ Hail! Fashion's Queen !
Who rules the sex to fifty from fifteen ;
Leader of waltzing and of female wit,
Who gives th' *écarté* or dramatic fit,
On various tempers acts by various ways,
To some teach gambling, others acting plays ;
Who Willis bids the voucher long delay,
While humbled dandies for subscriptions pray !
Hear me ! make Almack's junto grant my prayer ;
One single ball will cure a world of care ! ’ ”

THE scene must now change to the back drawing-room at Lady Norbury's, on the north-side of Portman-square, a bow-windowed apartment, displaying the beautiful scenery which most back-rooms exhibit in the proud city of

London, namely, a bird's-eye view of tiles, chimneys, and sloping-roofs of various heights and dimensions, the dusky smoke most picturesquely shrouding many of these fair objects from the contracted eye, in its slow endeavours to mount aloft, constantly driven earthward again by the heavily charged atmosphere which generally envelopes the British capital during the sweet season of Spring; when its wise inhabitants, with the self-denial of martyrs, relinquish the charms with which a kind and gracious providence has decked the face of nature for their use and pleasure, and bid adieu to all the joys of rural sights and rural sounds, to breathe the foul infected air of a soot-begrimed metropolis, whose fragrance is daily fed by at least half-a-million of sea-coal fires, and to feast their ears with the discordant music of bells innumerable; besides the cries, of various notes and kinds, with which our streets resound. Is this possible? who can witness it,

without longing to exclaim, in the beautiful language of the poet,

Oh ! how canst thou renounce the boundless store
Of charms, which Nature to her votary yields ;
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields,—
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the song of even,
All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of Heaven,—
Oh ! how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven !

BEATTIE'S MINSTREL.

But return, my roving Muse, resume thy purposed theme.—It was in the back drawing-room at Lady Norbury's, a room every body knows, fitted-up with scarlet damask, and very beautiful japan cabinets, illustrated with various nameless articles of old china, capital specimens of the *idéal beau* ; there was, besides, a splendid folding Indian screen, which was always placed behind the sofa so as to conceal the back entrance, thereby enabling that prince of grooms

of the chambers, Fudge, to leave the door always a little open. By this ingenious contrivance, our friend Fudge heard a great deal of what was going on, and was therefore more generally versed in the *on-dits* of the great world than most of his brethren of the anti-chamber.

Lady Norbury was sitting, or rather reclining, in her usual place on the sofa, with a load of cushions behind her back ; her largest shawl, of the newest Yorkshire manufacture, made somewhere near Halifax, thrown over her, and in her hand that ample newspaper *The Morning Herald*, unfolded, in order to screen her face from the fire. Lady Anne was on the small ottoman opposite to the chimney-piece, holding a French hand-screen, representing a review of the Royal Guard in the Champ de Mars, the moving machinery of which her ladyship seemed likely enough to break, by way of amusement.

Opposite to the sofá, on one of those extraordinary arm-chairs, which I believe owe their

invention to some fanciful lady at Edinburgh, sat, or rather I should say lay back (for it is quite impossible for the most perpendicularly-disposed person to sit upright in them,) a most distinguished and dignified personage, who, by means of a cambric pocket-handkerchief was endeavouring to preserve her *rouge* from the effect of Lady Norbury's bright, blazing fire.

To describe this lady so as to do her justice, will not be easy, but I must endeavour. Lady Hauton, for it was indeed no other than Lady Hauton herself, was neither young nor handsome nor lively nor amusing; but she rouged well, and dressed better than most people. She talked a great deal, she knew more than any person I ever met with, and both every thing and every body; she could quiz and she could flatter; and she understood how to manage all sorts of tempers and dispositions, as well as how to make use of all her acquaintances in some way or other. If she could not persuade, she could bully, which was often the easiest of the

two. In short, Lady Hauton was the fashion, and, moreover, the leader of the ladies patronesses, the bold spirit who was foremost both in council and in action. She had eloquence at will to defend herself when attacked, and she had spirit enough to carry all her projects by a *coup de main*. Such a person might, of course, do any thing; and as she laughed at all the world, so she was sure to have all the world at her feet. "Treat people like fools," she would often say, "and they will worship you:—stop to make up to them, and they will directly tread you under foot." A well-bred, no! I should say a high-bred lady of the nineteenth century in London, is certainly a sort of non-descript; a contradiction to all rules and rights. Lady Hauton made a point to set all ceremonies at defiance, though she could be the very slave of *étiquette* whenever it suited her convenience. She never did the honours of her house to any body: she was often decidedly rude. She would take a person up and let them

down, without any sort of reason; it was her whim and pleasure. She was unpunctual to the greatest degree, always kept every one waiting, and never arrived at a dinner till the fish and soup were sent away. If other people were smart, she would be a figure; and then she would appear a blaze of diamonds where she thought it might astonish or annoy. She would talk the greatest nonsense to make people stare; and then ridicule her own absurdities to put them still more out of countenance: yet every body said Lady Hauton was charming,—so full of wit and talent,—perhaps rather original, but then she was the queen of fashion, and certainly might do any thing.

Lady Hauton was quite a privileged person. She could flirt farther than any body, and yet keep her character; she could say and do the most ridiculous things imaginable, and yet be considered sensible. Then in what did her power lay? Was it talent? Was it wit?

No! it might be all comprised in one little,

simple word—"Impudence:"—which was what her ladyship termed, the power which strong minds have over weak ones.

"I suppose, my dear aunt," said Lady Hutton, "coals are very cheap at Norbury, for this blaze is really too fierce for my *rouge*. There, now I have got my veil down I shall do. You don't expect any men, I hope, Anne? for I am positively a fright. Where did you say *your* Lord Dorville is staying."

"At Elsinore Lodge, with the Sydenhams."

"Oh! with my dear friend, the elegant, *manièred* Mrs. Sydenham. I hate that woman, she's so full of vulgar pretensions, both *fausse* and *fade*. But there's a tall *soi-disant* beauty of a daughter; a sort of an heiress too. Really, Anne, you should look after Dorville, and not let him slip through your fingers in this way; he's no contemptible match, let me tell you."

"Dear! Georgiana, how absurd you are!" said the Countess; "Lord Dorville did very

well at Norbury ; but I hope soon to see Kilarney at Anne's feet."

"Do you? But I hear he is dying at Paris, so, if Anne does not take care, she may lose both her beaux. Well! my fair cousin, and what did you do with the man I sent you, the insinuating Hazlemere?" said Lady Hauton, fixing her eyes full on Lady Anne.

"Oh! as for Lord Hazlemere, your ladyship, or a certain gay Viscountess, had done for him at the Priory; besides, he seemed determined to be lord in waiting to Lady Glenmore."

"Now, 'pon your honour, Anne, was that so? I shall improve on your *bon mot*, and call him the lord of the bed-chamber to this new divinity. I have had him this morning to petition for a subscription for her for the next Almack's set; he wishes her to find the tickets on her table. Poor dear Hazlemere! he does seem a most devoted nephew. Is this youthful

beauty, then, so very attractive? He quite raves about her! But from what I hear, there is some danger of her being brought to bed at the ball on Wednesday."

"Oh, no! that is all nonsense, *manière de parler* because she is very large; but she returns to Glenmore Place for her confinement, in June. She is certainly very pretty indeed, though, of course, not in beauty now."

"One of old Lady Lochaber's attacks upon me," said Lady Hauton, "was that I made such absurd regulations about Almack's. She said I wanted to have an accoucheur and apothecary, with a table full of drugs in one of the anti-rooms; and that there was to be a physician attached to the establishment, with a bag-wig and sword. I begin to think it would be a very wise arrangement; for I see in the papers, that at some royal fête at Vienna, a German lady of the court rather unexpectedly presented his Imperial Majesty with a new subject, to which of course he stood godfather.

Really, Anne, it would give some *éclat* to the birth of this so much expected Lord Grandison, should he make his *entrée* into life amid the world of Almack's."

"Now you are much too absurd, Lady Hauton!" said Lady Norbury, yawning; "Lord Glenmore will take better care of his wife than that."

"As if she would let her husband interfere about her going to Almack's, my dear aunty! Excuse me, that is quite an antediluvian idea. But, Anne, you have heard that Lady Lochaber is no longer a patroness?"

"Yes; but no particulars. Who is to be her successor?"

"Ay, there 's the rub! the ballot is to be on Saturday, that the committee may sit as usual. Pray, have you seen the papers that have been left about at different houses? Abominably impertinent!"

"Never even heard of them. Oh! do let me see what they are like!"

“ Pray read them aloud, to keep your mother from going to sleep. My dear Lady Norbury, you will infallibly give me the gapes !”

Lady Anne read as follows.

“ ALMACK'S.

“ A vacancy having occurred in the direction of Almack's, we have been solicited to give currency to the following

“ *Advertisement.*

“ *Wanted* for the ensuing season at Almack's, as Patroness, a person of undeniable character, quick parts, good address, and well-known in the fashionable world: she must possess a good memory, be complete mistress of the peerage, and write a free running hand, besides being sufficiently grounded in the rudiments of arithmetic to understand the extent of the numbers to be admitted on her books. Her manner must be decided; so that she be always capable of giving evasive answers or positive denials, according to the situation of those from whom she receives applications,

“ She must possess great tact, in order to be able to practise with precision the different degrees of the *art of cutting*; which last qualification must be a *sine quâ non* previous to any attempt to enter as candidate.

“ And whereas many extraordinary-looking persons, whose faces were unknown, have occasionally been suffered to appear at Almack's, more especially about Easter, it is hereby specified, that none can be considered candidates for the office who are in *any way connected* with any singular-looking persons of either sex.

“ The above regulation will be strictly attended to, as owing to the Ladies Patronesses desire of obliging, the Committee might find themselves placed in disagreeable circumstances. No very good-natured person need apply, as it takes much time to get rid of that objectionable quality.

“ N. B. The situation is particularly adapted for widows. The inconvenience of disobliging persons of respectability who come from the country, (and who of necessity are among the *proscrits*,) having led to serious consequences in county elections.

“ Apply to any of the Ladies Patronesses for farther information.”

“ Cuts you all up famously,” said Lady Anne; returning the paper.

“ It is very good, I must allow,” said Lady Hauton; “ though I am in a great rage with the author: I am sure it is by Theophilus Cope. But the other is a thousand times worse:

I give it to Colonel Leach. Let me read it aloud, Anne; for it is long, and will tire you. This was sent me some time ago, down to the Priory, by the Duchess of Stavordale: she and Lady Plinlimmon were furiously angry about it.

“ IN an age like this, which, beyond all others, pretends to be most tenacious of encroachments upon liberty, we would call the public attention to the daring boldness of a society, formed within the last few years, and which has lately stretched its power to a degree hitherto unknown in this once generous land of liberty. This society, formed, directed, and supported by six individuals only, embraces however, in its extent, *persons of all ranks, professions, and political principles*. It commences its operations soon after the meeting of Parliament, when the leaders re-elect their members, and its power goes on increasing rapidly till after Easter, when it is at its zenith. Its most alarming properties are *its meeting at the hour of midnight*, when both houses of Parliament usually adjourn to this assembly, and its uniting men of the most *opposite principles*.

“ Dangerous and fearful must be the designs of a body of persons, who, stifling their sentiments of enmity, enter into a mysterious league, subversive of the liberties of our countrymen.

“ Nor is this alone confined to a coalition of Tories, Whigs, and Radicals; foreign powers are permitted, nay, invited to strengthen the combination.

“ Other societies have supported themselves, in defiance of clamorous opposition, by the talents of their leaders ; but the chiefs of the assembly to which we allude, despising such ordinary means of elevation, have raised themselves by depreciating others, and thus, like Oliver Cromwell himself, have created an authority *none dare dispute*.

“ They have the power of admitting into their association *any* person ; but rank, talent, fortune, or political considerations, are insufficient, if obnoxious to any one of the leaders ; and among the initiated, none can dare to say whether his own name may not be struck off the lists.

“ Authority so arbitrary, it might be conceived, would be resisted ; yet such is the importance attached to the society, that men estimate the consequence of others, only as they are, or are not, members of it.

“ On the Wednesdays appointed for the nocturnal confederation, every member presents himself with a certificate, labelled by one of the leaders : without this precious manuscript no ties of consanguinity, no claims of tender affection, can avail ; and the loved husband, the fond parent, or adoring lover, will in vain sue for admission. Should any one among the association be suspected of having illegally obtained one of these certificates, the unhappy victim is instantly cast into a darkened apartment, debarred of the luxuries or comforts to which he has been accustomed from infancy, there to remain in a dreadful state of suspense, till the heads of the league shall think fit to deliberate upon his alleged guilt ; and should any illegality be discoverable in the manner of his admission, he will be for ever branded with infamy.

"The year is now drawing to that period, when the confederation open, the secret committee will again be carried on; the mustering, the enrolling, the enumeration of the confidential, be again connived at, by a government which calls itself FREE. There will again be the same anxiety for election; hearts which once beat high with hope shall again sink to despair. The proscribed will again become proscribed, and the fatal cause still remain a mystery.

"Our noblest matrons will in vain sue for the admission of their choicest treasures--their sons and daughters: blind to the charms of youth, and deaf to the imploring accents of age, wrapped in its proudest security, the league will remain inexorable and triumphant.

"This then shall be a tale for future times, that in an age when the cry for liberty was loudest, when sovereignty was attacked, and all authority was contemned, there arose a secret junto, which alone reigned unopposed; which could alone enforce authority: a junto so mysterious, that none can penetrate its intricate arcana: a junto which, in its own emphatic language, comprises 'the whole world;' and with a talismanic spell, unites every possible desideratum, in the one little word,--

'ALMACKS.'

"I must acknowledge it is very clever," said Lady Hauton; "though it is so abominably severe. I am sure it is from Colonel Leach's satirical pen."

"And pray, what was the foolish quarrel

with Lady Lochaber about?" said Lady Norbury.

"Oh! it's a long story.—You know, my lord and I had collected a large party at the Priory for our theatricals, so there was no chance of my being up in town for the opening of Almack's. Lady Rochefort, on finding the Viscount bent on going to Paris, determined to come to us; of course you both know why—in the hope of meeting Mordaunt. Lady Bellamont was obliged to go to Brighton, for the health of one of her pale-faced daughters. Lady Plinlimmon chose to miscarry, at their Castle, at Pendarvis. So there were no patronesses in town but Lady Lochaber and the Duchess of Stavordale, who was come to town for her annual accouchement. Her grace being a most good-natured, easy, indolent creature, and glad to escape all fatigue and exertion, let the old Scotchwoman have it all her own way, and you never heard of any thing like the regulations she chose to introduce. I suspect Lady Bellamont was at the bottom

of it all though, and made a cat's paw of Lady Lochaber: for, because she has not succeeded in getting off any one of her six gawky daughters, who are all as ugly as sin, she chooses to attribute this disappointment to quadrilles;—if there were but reels and country-dances again, the Lady Hares, and many other odious frights, would have lovers immediately. So to please her, Lady Lochaber sagaciously determined to introduce those horrid dances, that the young ladies might be able to flirt comfortably with their partners, when they were not romping in a gallop down the middle; and, would you believe it? she had actually made overtures to old Gow, to attend with his Scotch band. But the Duchess wrote me word of it, and I sent to tell her ladyship I would not hear of such a thing as long as I was a patroness, and Lady Rochefort also signed the letter. Then Lady Lochaber chose to order away the *écarté* tables for the *chaperons* in the small room, which we had all agreed, *nem. con.*, at the close of the last season, would be a ca-

pital improvement. Now the idea of Lady Lochaber pretending to make and unmake arrangements, without consulting any one of us, was really too good ; because, though she was a patroness, she was such a complete old twaddle that nobody ever thought of asking her opinion about any thing,—but she determined, it seems, to make the most of a little brief authority, and she has paid for it. Unluckily, the Duchess of Stavordale, being more than usually inactive and unwell, could not exert herself to make a stand against old Lochaber's innovations, particularly as she did not see what was going on, not being able to attend after the first ball. However, she used to write volumes to me and to Lady Plinlimmon about what she heard, and the poor soul fretted so about it, that she made herself ill, and was brought to bed before her time, of a seven months' child : however, she has done well, or I should never have ceased reproaching myself and Almack's as the cause of this mischance. But she means to attend the

Committee, in order to elect a new patroness, the first time of her going out. There is nothing like good-will, after all."

"But how did you turn out Lady Lochaber at last?" enquired Lady Anne, with some curiosity.

"Oh! I give myself some credit for it. When I found out these abominable innovations, I wrote a circular letter to all the ladies, stating, that as Lady Lochaber and I differed in *toto* on all points, it was quite impossible we could both stay in, so they must make their choice between us at Easter. I certainly had laboured hard for some years in the service; Almack's had been always the subject nearest my heart; but after the proud pre-eminence to which they had raised me, as their *première*, it could never be expected that I should remain among them in a subaltern situation. I submitted my fate to them, and promised to be satisfied with their decision, whatever it might be. I wish I could show you the notes I had in return.

“ Lady Plinlimmon insisted on my staying in, ‘*pro bono publico*.’ So like her ! is not it ? always sporting a bit of blue.—Lady Rochefort said ‘she would willingly sacrifice a thousand Lady Lochabers for me.’—Lady Bellamont hoped ‘to keep us both in, but to please me, she would give up Gow and his country-dances and reels.’—The Duchess of Stavordale ‘would resign herself, if I went out ; she had already,’ she said, ‘nearly sacrificed herself and her infant in the cause.’ Well ! I kept firm ; if Lady Lochaber quitted the public service I consented to remain ; and, in order to appear perfectly unconcerned, I staid in the country, with my party at the Priory, where I thought it vastly sulky of you, Anne, not to join us. This day se’nnight I received the following printed communication by the post :—

‘ The Dowager Lady Lochaber presents her compliments to the Almack’s Committee, and begs to inform them, that after the various

indignities she has received, she cannot think of retaining any longer her official situation at the Board of Red Cloth. Lady Lochaber believes that her resignation will remove the only bar against Lady Hauton's tyrannic despotism, as she was the only member daring enough to make a struggle in favour of common sense.

‘ Lady Lochaber does not, in the least, envy her successor, whoever that unfortunate person may be. (Circular.)’

“ On the receipt of this I came to town immediately, the Tuesday in last week. I found my table covered with notes of congratulation; I wish you had been arrived then, Anne. A committee was held the next day, and I was empowered by common consent to choose Lady Lochaber's successor; it was also settled that there should be no Almack's in Easter week, in order to give us more time. But there is to be another committee held on Saturday, when I

am to propose the new patroness; but the rest must all approve of the person I nominate. However, of that there is no doubt, for I know how to manage them: indeed, Lady Bellamont is the only rebellious spirit we have, and she will not dare to face me. Then Lady Lochaber's list is to be given up to her successor. To be sure, a curious set of quizzes she always did admit; she deserved to be turned out, if it were only for that. But now, Anne, conceive my immense embarrassment."

"Why, whom have you thought of, my dear Georgiana?"

"Ah! now, there's the secret! But what would you say, if I were to tell you that I came here to pump Lady Norbury on the subject? I want her to take the office; but I preached to her about it for an hour before you came in, and she is quite inexorable—will not even hear of it."

"Good heavens! Lady Hauton, the very

idea of such a thing kills me ! The trouble ! the writing and receiving so many notes ! Such a horrible kind of slavery !” said Lady Norbury faintly.

“ But the refusals are all printed : there is only the name to put in, and Anne would save you all that trouble. Or you might keep a secretary, my good lazy aunt. I could recommend you several nice young women for such an office : preparatory governesses,—it would give them some insight into high life.”

“ Indeed, my dear Georgiana, I would not be condemned to have so much anxiety even for my own most particular friends ; but for strangers ! people one does not care about ! the very thought of it would make me miserable. I have no ambition ;—of that sort, I mean. No ! nothing should ever compel me to be a lady patroness of Almack's. I always thought you mad, to undertake voluntarily such a horrible office.” And Lady Norbury threw herself quite back against her cushions, in a sort of despair at the

cruel picture of an official life which her imagination at that moment presented to her, as she smelt at her salts to dispel her vapours.

“Of course, your ladyship must do as you please; but I see in Anne’s eyes, how cruelly disappointed she is at your being so perverse. My dear cousin, what a pity it is you are not married! you would be the very thing for us. Come, encourage that loitering Dorville, and I will keep the office open for you. I am sure, if they looked in your face, they might say as Pope did of his *Belinda*—

‘Oft she rejects, but never once offends.’

There would be a Patroness for you! such a one, I fear, as I must not expect to meet with in a hurry.”

“Wait till Anne becomes Lady Killarney,” said Lady Norbury, with sudden animation.

“Then they may wait for ever, Ma’am,” said Lady Anne, sulkily.

“Nonsense!” replied Lady Norbury; “Kil-

larney wrote me word himself, not a month ago, that he should be in town in April."

"But have not you heard that he is dying?"

"Oh! I don't believe a word of it; of course George would have been sent for long ago. It's all a Paris fabrication, or an invention of the newspapers,—a lie of the Morning Post!"

"Oh, by the by, talking of George," said Lady Hauton, "I hear he is head-over-ears in love with some beautiful girl he met at Norbury, who sings like an angel! What was her name? Oh, I have it; a Miss Mildmay."

"Such absurd nonsense! mere country gossip!" said Lady Norbury.

Lady Anne smiled significantly.—"May be true, for all that," observed Lady Hauton. "And pray, where is this divinity now?"

"Gone to the Baroness de Wallestein's, in Portland Place, where she is to pass the season," said Lady Anne.

“Are you acquainted with Madame de Walstein?”

“No, only by report as yet; but Louisa Mildmay is to introduce us to her the first opportunity. You know she was a Miss Montague, of Atherford Abbey, near Norbury; but her father was ruined some years ago, before I came out, and was obliged to live abroad: there she married this Austrian Baron, who was then ambassador at Paris, where they have lived ever since. Mamma will have to visit them, of course.”

“I used to know them at Paris, two winters ago,” said Lady Hauton: “her *soirées* there were really *brillantissimes*. She is a very pretty-fashioned sort of creature, and had all the men literally at her feet. I have some idea, too, I saw this pretty Miss Mildmay with her then, for I was often at her parties in the Rue Royale: I dare say she won’t recollect me now, because Hauton’s father was alive then, and I

was Lady Clifton. So you don't know her yet, Anne?"

"No, not yet; but I can be introduced to her any day or hour."

"I want to see this Baroness again, very much. From the account the Bellamonts have sent me of her from Brighton, and what Lord Hare has told me, I think she would be the very thing for us. They say she was more admired than any body at the Pavilion; dresses inimitably; speaks French and English equally well; is *remplie d'esprit*; full of Parisian grace, and a perfect coquette—just the pretensions for a lady patroness. She would do so well about introducing foreigners, who, after all, are the cream among our Almack's beaux: I must see her without loss of time. Now I did think once that Lady Glenmore would have done for us exactly, by all I had heard of her; because her extraordinary marriage has made her a kind of lion, a sort of wonder. But then her present situation is quite a bar, for really we

must not have any more lying-in patronesses during this season. But this beautiful ambassador would suit exactly. Being new and foreign, she would follow my directions, and yet be a certain attraction to all the men, for I hear she was quite the rage at Brighton."

In a minute or two Lady Hauton rose suddenly, and rang the bell. I will go to her now," said her ladyship; "for I have no time to lose, I am sure. What number in Portland Place do the Wallesteins live at?"

"Dear! if you are going there directly," said Lady Anne, "take me with you, and I will be mistress of the ceremonies, and introduce you properly. I do not remember the number, but I can direct the footman: it is one of the large white houses, pretty high up."

"I know she is at home," said Lady Hauton; "because I despatched that useful creature Miss Bevil there, in my carriage, and she was to return if she did not find them."

"There is one thing you forget," said Lady

Anne ; “ she probably has taken such a golden opportunity for doing some other convenient jobs for herself, besides the one you sent her on ; or, I dare say, she has employed your footman to deliver some notes or messages. Trust Miss Bevil for that ; she always puts the carriages and servants of all her friends in requisition.”

Fudge, however, announced that Lady Hauton's carriage was waiting. The two ladies therefore took leave of Lady Norbury, and departed for Portland Place. They were ushered into the dressing-room, where they found the Baroness and Miss Louisa Mildmay, in deep conversation with Miss Bevil and Lady Olivia Beaulieu.

The introductions took place, the usual preliminaries of conversation were gone through with grace and *esprit* on the part of the Baroness, with condescension and easy *nonchalance* on that of Lady Hauton. She reminded Madame de Wallestein of her acquaintance with her at Paris, when she was Lady Clifton, which

explained to the Baroness why her ladyship's features were so perfectly familiar to her. She instantly remembered that she used generally to be attended by the handsome Prince de Clairval, *la perle des aimables roués* of that year, who was always supposed to be the *cavaliere servente* of the dashing Lady Clifton. Lady Anne, meanwhile, was catechizing Louisa, and bringing all her colour back into her cheeks, while her ladyship's quick eye travelled round the apartment, and took note of every object.

“ Well, you see, my Lady Hauton,” said the bustling Miss Bevil, drawing up her petticoats, and placing her feet in no very graceful attitude upon the fender, “ how nicely I have managed. I thought you would have volumes to tell Lady Norbury. Thinks I to myself, no need to hurry ; so I took the opportunity to call at my Lord Beaulieu's, in Hereford-street—you know, once in Oxford-street, 'twas a mere step there. And very lucky, to be sure, it was ! Not a creature at home but poor Lady Olivia, moping all

by herself; my lord and the other two gone out riding; the Italian Countess obliged to walk to Count Ludolph's on particular business: nothing could be more *apropos* than my calling. So Lady Olivia wasn't a minute in whipping on her things; and when I had got her into the carriage, I thought, 'Dear! what a nice opportunity to pay a pop visit to Mrs. Metcalf!' Well, your ladyship's two giants of footmen were vastly obliging; 'It was a mere nothing out of the way,' the coachman said, 'to Lower Grosvenor-street;' and so, to be sure, there we drove, and found the poor old lady only just up, with such a cough! Mercy on her lungs! enough to tear her to pieces! She took my call as great charity, and we were prodigious friends again. I warrant you she was famously astonished to see me in your ladyship's carriage, in such style, with the two servants. Then, having Lady Olivia with me was an excuse for not staying long, so we kept off all old stories. And then I puffed the grand doings at the Priory; and

appealed to Lady Olivia if I had not written her word, that we had such loads of men at our command there, that really the difficulty was not to marry; and that if Lord Beaulieu would but have packed off his three daughters to us, your ladyship would have sent them all back doublets. Did not I, Lady Olivia?"

"Yes, indeed you did," said the young lady; "and I am sure I do wish somebody would send a cart-load of marrying men to London, or I think we shall all be old maids like you, Miss Bevil. Now don't you find it very horrid?"

"No! Liberty and independence for me," said Miss Bevil. "I once intended to have married, but lately I have changed my opinion. You have nothing like my kind of happy singleness, now, in France, Madame de Wallestein. Old England is *le pays pour les demoiselles*; but Paris I acknowledge to be *le paradis des femmes*."

A pause ensued; Lady Hauton was debating

how to get rid of the independent Miss Bevil: so at last she remembered having heard it observed, that every Frenchman had his price, and she was of opinion that the same might be said of every Englishman, and woman too.

“ My dear Miss Bevil, I want you to do a commission for me. Will you take my carriage and go down to Howell's in Waterloo Place, and buy me some pretty, elegant *souvenir*, to give a little god-daughter of mine? Let it be very novel and *recherché*. I give you *carte blanche* for the price. Perhaps Lady Olivia will assist you with her taste? Bid them add it to my bill.”

“ Oh, I shall like nothing better !” said Lady Olivia; “ I do dearly love to go to Howell's; one meets all the world there, and sees such beautiful things.”

“ I advise you to remember, that several young men on the look-out have declared they will never marry any woman whose carriage is often seen at the ruination shop in Waterloo

Place," said Lady Hauton, laughing; "when you are married, of course, *c'est autre chose*."

"Oh! I don't care," said Lady Olivia.

"Be independent like me," said Miss Bevil, "whether you're married or single; and go where you please, without minding those creatures men, or their fancies. Oh! Lady Hauton, before I go, pray remember I have one of my little diplomatic parties on Monday; I got your footman to leave several notes for me. I am to have Signor Collini with his guitar; and a man who tells fortunes from people's handwriting; and a lot of all kinds of foreigners;—so of course you will be welcome," to the Baroness, "as you will know every body;—and you too, Miss Louisa, and I trust you will favour us with some of your pretty airs—I always say foreigners and music go together. But come! Lady Olivia, are you ready?"

"Stop one moment! Dear Lady Hauton, may we hope for a subscription for the next Almack's?"

Lady Hanton put her hand before her mouth: " I never tell secrets out of school ; your petition will be presented to the committee with the others, on Monday. Good morning, Miss Bevil ; you can take the carriage home when you have found what you like, and then send it back for me here. If Madame de Wallestein wishes to get rid of me sooner, I shall beg her to set me down at Lady Norbury's with Lady Anne.

As they passed Louisa, in going away, Lady Olivia whispered to her very audibly, " Oh do you know, Miss Mildmay, we have an invitation to dinner from Lady Birmingham for Saturday, so I think she will ask us to her balls. Papa saw that their chimney was on fire the other day, and he called to tell Lady Birmingham ; and by way of return she has sent to ask us to dine there, and as he wants much to see the famous warehouse he has accepted the invitation."

When they were gone, Lady Hanton said

with a smile, "certainly there is a road to every body's heart, and the way to Miss Bevil's would be through a carriage. What a happy nickname for her that was which Colonel Leach gave her—'the footman's devil,' poor old thing! I have sent her off, I see, quite happy with that pretty foolish Lady Olivia. But now, Madame de Wallestein, will you think me very impertinent, if I ask you to shut your doors upon your friends for the next half-hour, as I really have a favour of some importance to beg of you?"

The Baroness, with some surprise, gave the order to Felix: she did not mean to be *chez elle ce matin*. Louisa only looked her astonishment. Lady Anne smiled, and left off her jokes about Lord George Fitzallan.

Lady Hauton stated her case with much eloquence. "Almack's," she said, for it was of Almack's alone that she wished to speak, "was certainly the most popular assembly that had

ever existed in London ; it was really the chief glory produced by the peace ; nothing could exceed its widely extended fame ; it was the favourite theme of poets and public writers ; it constituted the chief happiness of the patrician youth of this country ; it was the weekly resort of her leading statesmen and heroes, during half the year. Who," continued her ladyship with increasing energy, " would not feel interested in the prosperity of such a society ? and yet we are threatened with so many evils, that I have no hesitation in foretelling a dissolution of the compact which has produced such wondrous works, unless some friendly hand be held out to assist us. Madame de Wallestein, you are the person who must raise us up : you, and you alone, can save us from discord and cabals."

The Baroness in great astonishment, begged to know what was expected of her. "*Je n'y entends rien, moi !*"

" You must be one of us, my dear Madam ;

you must take office forthwith, and become a lady patroness of Almack's."

"Oh delightful!" said Louisa, clapping her hands, "I guessed as much from the beginning."

"Now for Madame de Wallestein's answer!" said Lady Anne.

"May it be but favourable!" said Lady Hauton, "and she will save me a world of troubles."

The Baroness shook her head; then taking Lady Hauton's hand with infinite grace—"I feel really *accablée*, *penetrée* with so much kindness: that you should even have thought of me for so high a situation, is far too great an honour; but I am quite unfit for such distinction, my ignorance of English society and etiquette, my *manque d'usage parmi vous autres*."

"That is the very reason why you will do better than any body; every thing will be justified by your being a foreigner; it will legalize all your caprices. My dear Baroness, your suc-

cess at the Pavilion at Brighton has stamped your situation in the *grand monde* at once. You must be the *ton*; you cannot be ignorant that, at this moment, you are already quite the fashion. Is not every body imitating your style, your *tournure distinguée*? Your being a lady patroness would alone ensure a brilliant attendance at Almack's for the whole season: every body would be so anxious to see the beautiful Austrian ambassadress. I am empowered to nominate the successor to Lady Lochaber, but the other patronesses must all agree in approving my choice; and it is so very difficult to find any person at once fit for the office and agreeable to all. Now you are known to the public, but not individually acquainted with any of these ladies, so there can be no caballing against you. *Allons! soyez aimable: donnez votre consentement! Vous réunirez tous les suffrages.*"

"*Que me conseillez-vous, ma chère amie?*" said the Baroness to Louisa, overcome with most be-

coming modesty : “ advise me what to do in this difficult situation.”

“ Oh, I should accept the honours offered to me,” said Louisa smiling, “ without hesitation.”

“ To be sure,” said Lady Anne, “ take the good the gods provide, and be thankful.”

“ You are a charming girl,” said Lady Hutton with a criticizing glance at Louisa, “ and you will be a great addition to our list of *belles*, Miss Mildmay. Upon my word, my cousin George may set up for a man of taste in beauty.” Then, without choosing to observe the young lady’s evident confusion, she said, turning to the Baroness, “ Well, my dear Madame de Wallestein, what is your ultimatum ? I am all impatience to know your decision ; pray, be merciful to me, and accept office.”

“ *Mais le Baron ?*” said the hesitating lady, “ perhaps he might not approve. Had I not better consult him ?”

“ Now, what, in the name of wonder, can his

Excellency have to do with it? I suppose you don't consult him about your visiting-book, do you?—at least we English wives never do our husbands, or even show them our notes. If you should have to go to the committee at Willis's rooms once a week, every Monday, probably that will 'be the head 'and front of your offending, no more.' Pray, how is the Baron to know that you are not gone to a dress-committee at Howell's; or to a bargaining speculation at Harding's? Or you may tell him you have to attend at the Foreign Bible-committee at Rivingtons; or to visit some of the old ex-maids of honour at St. James's Palace: he will be no wiser; it can be no business of his. Besides, the Baron will, of course, be so much occupied with other things—this new Austrian loan—the study of the balance of Europe against the expected Congress; he will never think of Almack's, unless he should hear that Prince Metternich was to be there. Leave him to *la haute diplomatie*.

Depend upon it, he will never hear that you are a patroness, unless he should happen to read it among the *on-dit* of the day, in John Bull, some wet Sunday. No, no! my dear Madame de Wallestein, I will hear of no refusal. I shall propose you on Saturday; and if there is no opposition to my nomination, which I feel certain there will not be, you shall hear from me; but, by the by, that will be informal; as, of course, you will have an official notification in the evening, and on Monday morning I shall call to take you to the committee."

The Baroness could obtain no reprieve. Lady Hauton was determined, and to her will and pleasure resistance was useless, and remonstrance vain. She, however, declared that her acceptance could not be considered certain, till she had consulted the Baron.

"I will not allow a husband's interference in this affair." Such were Lady Hauton's last words. "I bar such a dangerous precedent. I

would have the gentlemen weigh well, before they venture to interfere in any way with the decrees of Almack's, which every one knows to be decidedly the fourth estate of the realm."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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